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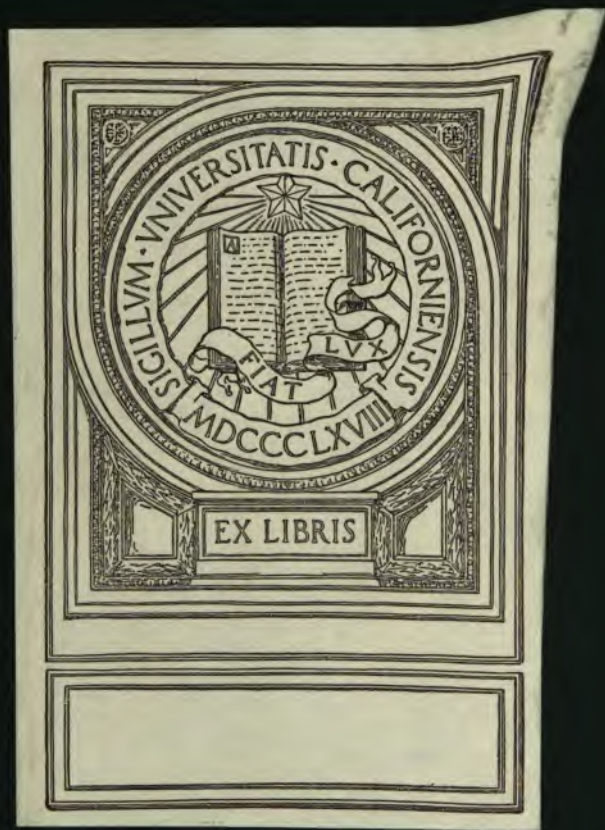
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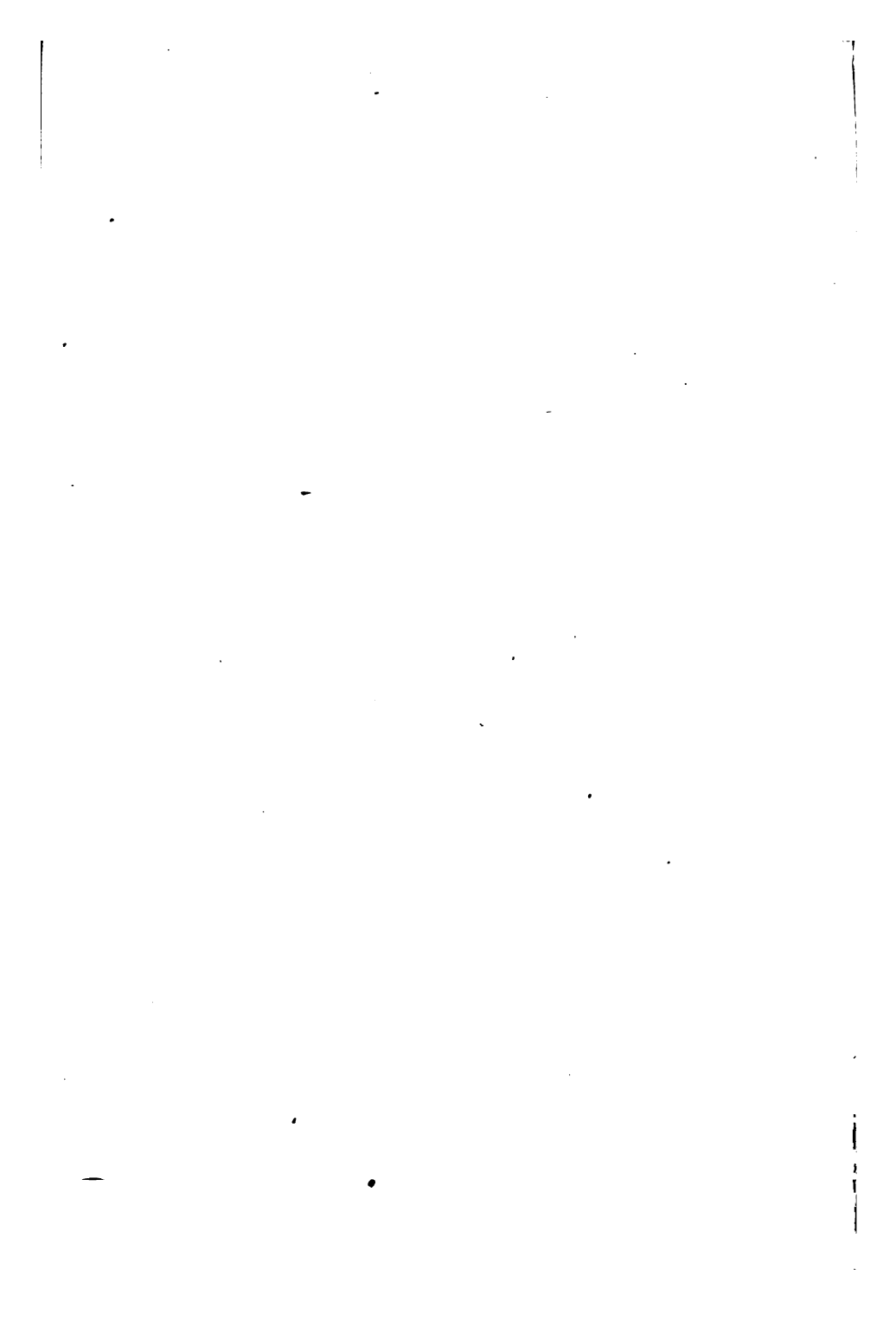
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WILLIAM WORDSWORTH



# WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

BY

ELIZABETH WORDSWORTH

PRINCIPAL OF LADY MARGARET HALL, OXFORD

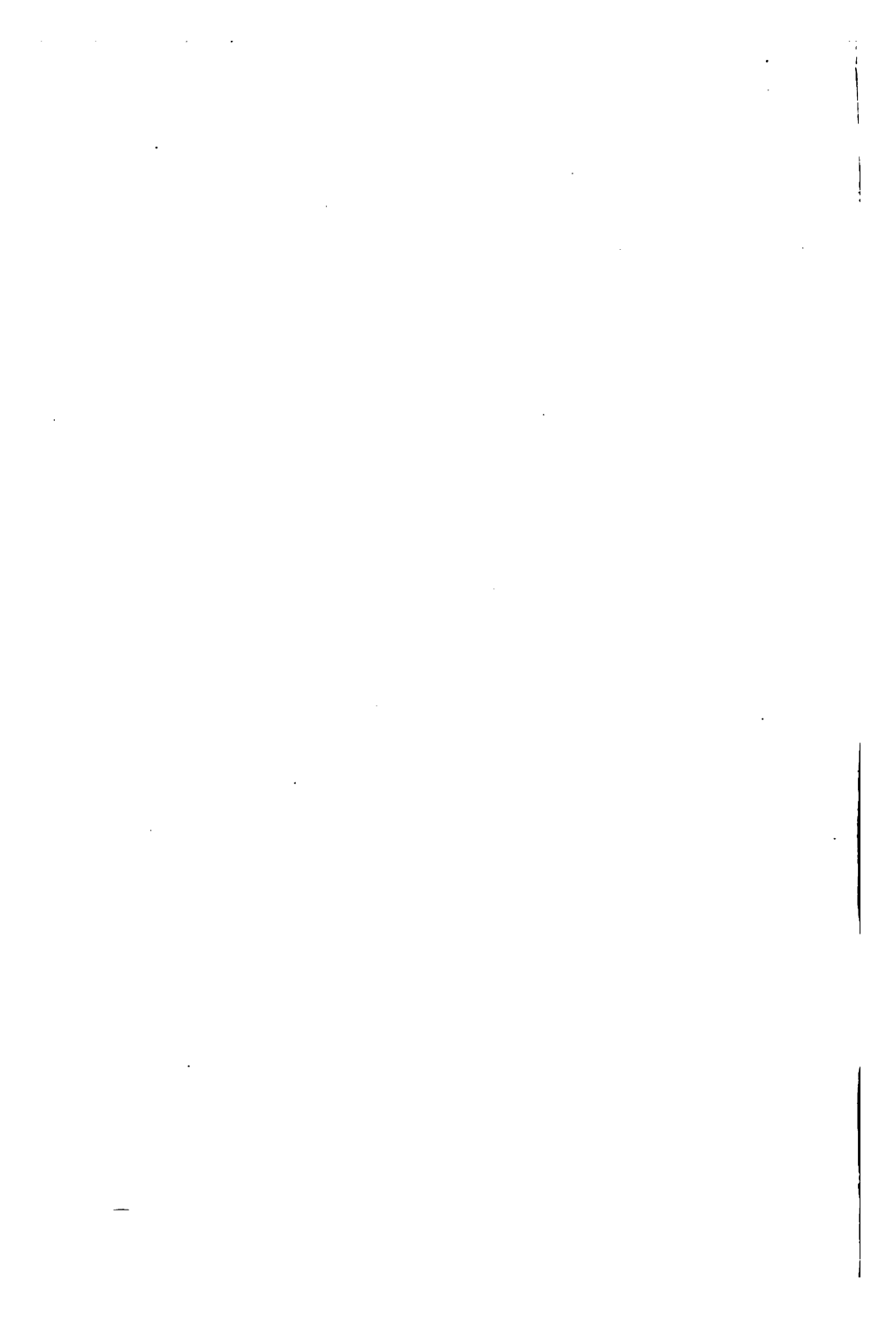
Was glänzt, ist für den Augenblick geboren,  
Das Echte bleibt der Nachwelt unverloren.

GOETHE.

London

PERCIVAL AND CO.

1891

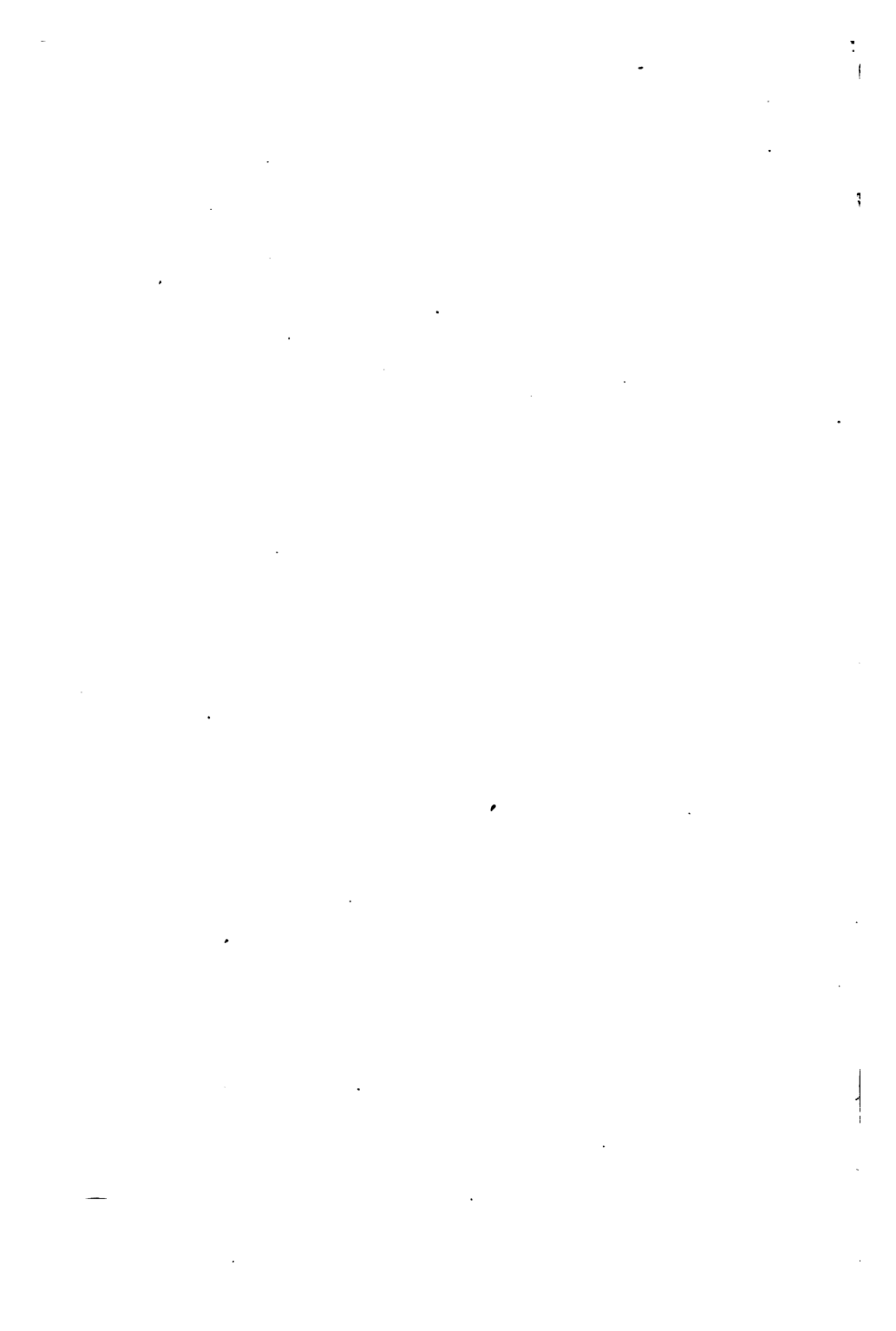


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## TO WORDSWORTH

THERE have been poets that in verse display  
The elemental forms of human passions ;  
Poets have been, to whom the fickle fashions  
And all the wilful humours of the day  
Have furnished matter for a polish'd lay ;  
And many are the smooth elaborate tribe  
Who, emulous of thee, the shape describe  
And fain would every shifting hue pourtray  
Of restless Nature. But, thou mighty Seer !  
'Tis thine to celebrate the thoughts that make  
The life of souls, the truths for whose sweet sake  
We to ourselves and to our God are dear.  
Of Nature's inner shrine thou art the priest,  
Where most she works when we perceive her least.

HARTLEY COLERIDGE.





## PREFACE

THE following pages can claim but little merit on the score of originality. The materials for biographies of Wordsworth have been pretty thoroughly exhausted by previous writers, notably by Professor Knight in his magnificent and scholarly edition of the Poet's works ; while Mr. Myers's graceful sketch has a charm, a freshness, and a suggestiveness which can never fail to interest his readers. The *Memoirs of Wordsworth* by the late Bishop of Lincoln have been freely drawn upon, and their value warmly acknowledged by both these able writers ; and it is to that work that the present writer is mainly indebted.

She hopes to be forgiven for saying that, standing in close relationship to the author of those *Memoirs*, who was intellectually almost as a son to the Poet himself, she has been deeply conscious of the reverence which the first of Wordsworth's biographers felt for his memory, and of the reserve

which he imposed on himself in the performance of his task. He shrank from noting down and perpetuating the gossiping trivialities which unimaginative writers are fond of chronicling for the benefit of inquisitive readers.

He respected himself, he revered his subject too much for that. The close personal intimacy, the frequent intercourse he had enjoyed with the venerable old man who had shown him an all but fatherly affection, so far from dulling his sense of what was due to such a character, only served to intensify it, and nothing would have given him greater pain than to dwell on the passing weaknesses, and the commonplace and unedifying details from which no human life is wholly exempt.

There are, of course, obvious objections to any biography written by a near relation. The biographer is like one who tries to sketch a cathedral tower when standing immediately beneath it—his perspective can hardly help being faulty. On the other hand, he knows better than any one else of what material the tower really is made, and whether it is in truth what it appears to ordinary eyes. And it is well that those who knew Wordsworth best should have left on record their testimony of what he was and how dearly he was loved. His

personal qualities were not unlike his literary character ; viewed from either point he presented the same aspect of perfect sincerity, absence of all pretension, and deep and real devotion to the friends he loved and to the truth he honoured. He showed his worst, perhaps, to the outside world, his best assuredly to his nearest and dearest.

The forty years which have elapsed since his death have not brought to light one disgraceful action, one single utterance or incident that need shrink from day. Words with him were as sacred as things ; his life was an absolutely consistent whole, the poet was the man. And it is this veracity and uprightness of moral character which makes us derive such invigoration from his poetry. The vision in the temple is made real to our minds by the fact that the prophet has shown his sincerity and trustworthiness in matters of which we ourselves can judge. In like manner also Wordsworth's spiritual insight, his strong and unchanging moral convictions, come to us with imperative force because his eye for outward nature is so true, and his readiness to contemplate even her lowliest aspects is so unfailing.

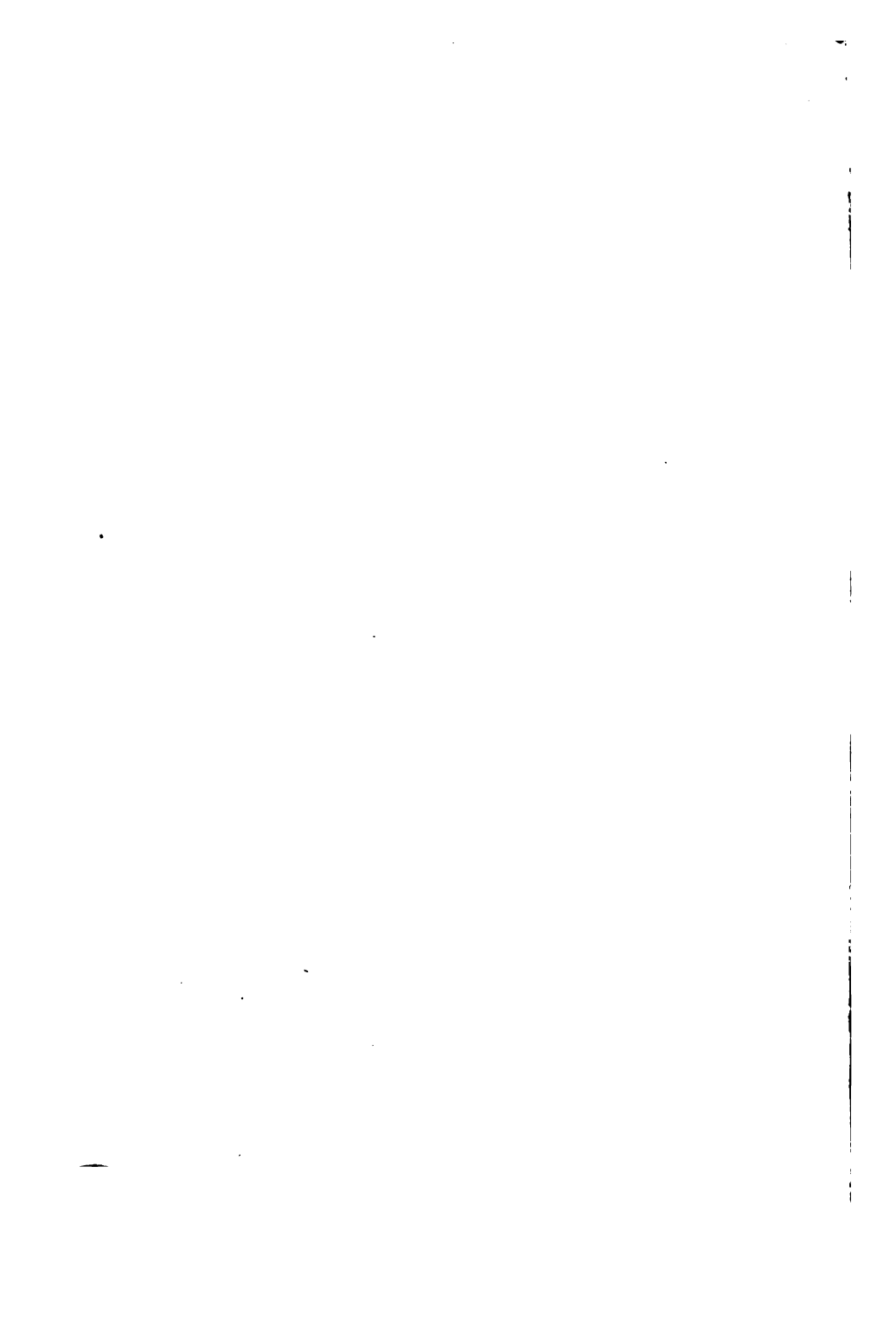
He stands out, with his steadfast countenance, his unshrinking gaze, his unflinching utterance, his

noble directness and singleness of purpose, in the midst of a perplexed and vacillating crowd ; his voice gives no uncertain sound, his purpose is fixed, his faith is clear, he has looked Truth in the face, he has vowed himself to the service of Duty.

In an age like our own of uncertainty, of misgiving, of tentative effort, and too often of second-hand thought and shallow sensational feeling, such a character, such utterances, acquire, if possible, additional value and weight. It is because our own generation is what it is, and because he is what he is, that such an attempt as the present has seemed worth making.

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## CHAPTER I

### EARLY LIFE

NEXT to Stratford-upon-Avon there is perhaps, outside London, no spot of ground which appeals so forcibly to the enthusiastic American visiting England, as Grasmere. There, as at Stratford, he meets with that indescribable charm which has made the "country churchyard" immortal in the pages of Gray, the mingling of natural beauty with the pathos of man's life, the stillness and consecrated repose which religion gives, set in exquisite juxtaposition with human achievement and human endurance. But the contrasts between Stratford-upon-Avon and Grasmere are as suggestive as their points of resemblance.

Each contains a poet's grave ; the one boasts a stately capacious church with its fine spire, its tall Perpendicular windows, its rich meadow grass, its "soft flowing" river winding round the churchyard like a natural boundary. There is a comeliness

and sweetness about it all ; we feel it ought to be the birthplace of graciousness ; and the epithet "gentle" so happily applied to Shakspeare by his great contemporary is seen at once to be appropriate, and the geniality of temperament which it indicates to be the key to his sympathetic, many-sided, versatile, and yet deeply and sublimely poetic nature.

How like yet how unlike Grasmere ! In the latter place too there is a church, but it is, by comparison, low and rude, with little architectural merit—the square tower, the wide stoutly-timbered low-pitched roof, seem made for resisting storms, not like the Stratford spire, to court the play of sunshine. There are few monuments of any dignity or importance. The Rotha, that little mountain stream which winds so picturesquely around the roots of the churchyard trees, would seem insignificant indeed beside the full flow of the Avon. Everything is simple ; one might say austere. Yet no one who has ever been there on a fine summer's evening, and met a procession of rosy mountain children on the day of the annual "rush-bearing," with wreaths and brilliant garlands, singing hymns as they made the tour of the village on their way to the church, would deny that (as there is nothing more beautiful than the smile on an habitually grave face) so few of the splendid shows of the world could nestle so deep



in the affections as the memory of this homely dale. Such a spot seems fit to be the home of a poet, but of a poet who should have a lofty austere manliness of soul, a self-denying earnestness, a certain concentration and even limitation of view, a kind of imaginative asceticism akin to the character of the region and the clime. It would, however, be almost impossible for such a place to produce a great dramatist. Here is no navigable river. Ben Jonson was right when he spoke of Shakspeare's

*Flights upon the banks of Thames*

That did so take Eliza and our James.

There is no harbour, no coast, nothing to ease that interchange of human passions, that friction of wits, that clash of varied interests and temperaments, which made the Athenian stage the wonder and the despair of all time to come.

It is like being in a natural church; to spend one's holiday there is like having a "week of Sundays." One seems shut off from the world, and listening to the echoes of the ninetieth Psalm, *Domine refugium*. And the heart of hearts of that still and sacred region may be found in a group of graves beside the Rotha—grass-grown graves with simple unadorned headstones where lie William Wordsworth and those who were dearest to him on earth.

How wonderful, we may think, has been the destiny of this little island of ours! Who, looking at it from the Shaksperian standpoint, could ever have dreamed of its physical resources, to be developed in these three intervening centuries? But who, we may add, looking upon it from the standpoint not only of Shakspeare but even of Addison or Pope, could have dreamed of the regeneration of English literature which was to take its rise from that small mountainous district, and to be indissolubly associated with the names of hills and valleys which the polite gentlemen of those days could barely have brought their lips to pronounce? Yet there it lay, quiet, still, and biding its time. The clouds coursed over the mountain-tops, the sunsets were glorious behind the Langdale Pikes, the daffodils were nodding by Ullswater side, the cuckoo's wandering voice was echoed "at once far off, and near," but the world knew not of them. It was quite happy, and thought Mr. Pope's

As when the moon, refulgent lamp of night,

a considerable improvement on the balder phraseology of Homer. It called young men "swains" and young women "nymphs," and it drove out to admire the beauties of nature, in a coach and four. Any one who has inherited from his or her grandfather a collection of those dreary

volumes called the *British Poets* will form some idea of the pass to which English literature had come. The "Gottscheds'che Gewässer" of which Goethe speaks in his well-known review of German poetry in *Aus meinem Leben* could not have been a drearier deluge. Yet there were signs of better things. Gray, had he been bolder and less fastidious, Cowper, if he had ever let himself go, Shenstone, if he had not been afraid of his fine gentlemen critics; Thomson, if he had not had too much of the "dominie" about him—might all have written even better poetry than they did. But none of these had felt the full grandeur of which English poetry was capable, a grandeur which it shares with the loftiest utterances of the greatest races of the world.

To produce this, something more than a keen sense of natural beauty is required. The poet must not only have his passion for nature brought, so to speak, to its highest pitch, but he must be no less kindled with a fervid enthusiasm for the great ideas which actuate humanity when at its best and noblest. He must have *lived*, he must have *felt*. He must have the insight of a philosopher, the foresight of a prophet, as well as the oversight (if we may dare to coin a new word) of an artist. Let us see how far these conditions met in the case of William Wordsworth and of the moment of history in which he flourished. The oft-told

story of his early life with its few incidents may soon be recalled. He was born at Cocker~~m~~outh 7th April 1770. His father, John Wordsworth, a solicitor, was the descendant of an old, respected, untitled family (which had been settled at Penistone in Yorkshire probably before the Conquest, and had two generations earlier migrated to Sockbridge in Westmoreland); and belonged to the class which produces farmers, attorneys, clergy, tradesmen, soldiers, and sailors, and which, while obliged to depend on its own exertions, is nevertheless rarely exposed to the shifts and struggles of poverty; a class which commands respect while it does not relieve its members from the necessity of independent action, or expose them to the temptations incident to great wealth and luxury, and obliges them to develop whatever is in them. Nothing can be more interesting than to contrast the respectable middle class life of a man like Wordsworth with the respectable middle class life of a man like Goethe. To do so in detail would be to take up too much space in the present pages, but any one who has time to read the *Prelude* side by side with Goethe's early autobiography will find it a most rewarding study. There is a dignity and a simplicity in the former that is quite lacking in the latter, while on the other hand the much wider receptivity of Goethe's nature seems in keeping with the much more varied influences under

which he came even in boyhood. But to return. Wordsworth was one of a family of four brothers,—Richard, William, John, and Christopher,—and of one sister, Dorothy, whose name will ever be associated with his own.

His mother (*née* Cookson) died when he was but eight years old—

Early died

My honoured Mother, she who was the heart  
And hinge of all our learnings and our loves.

*Prelude, v.*

The few little reminiscences of her are characteristic—her pinning the nosegay to his breast before an Easter catechising; her rebuking him for wanting a penny for seeing a woman doing penance in church; the glimpse of her through the door in her last illness; her words about himself to an intimate friend that William was the only one of the children she was anxious about, “for he would be remarkable either for good or for evil.”

Being so anxious, it was the more to her credit that she had the good sense to leave her children to be developed by Nature and God’s providence :

Was not puffed up by false unnatural hopes,  
Nor selfish with unnecessary cares,  
Nor with impatience from the season asked  
More than its timely produce, . . . through a grace  
Of modest meekness, simple-mindedness,  
A heart that found benignity and hope,  
Being itself benign.—*Prelude, v.*

At her death he was already at school at Hawkshead, that most beautiful spot overhanging Esthwaite Lake, where the interesting monument of Archbishop Sandys, the founder of the school, still occupies a conspicuous position in the chancel, and where—

The snow-white church upon her hill  
Sits like a thronèd Lady, sending out  
A gracious look all over her domain.

The cottage of Ann Tyson, his “frugal dame,” is still to be seen, where he

Had lain awake on summer nights to watch  
The moon in splendour couched among the leaves  
Of a tall ash, that near our cottage stood.—*Prelude*, iv.

To his recollection of this period in his life may also be referred the spirited lines on skating when

All shod with steel,  
We hissed along the polished ice in games  
Confederate.—*Prelude*, i.

And it may be mentioned here that to his life's end he continued an excellent skater, and could cut his name on the ice when quite an elderly man.

The lines in the *Prelude* (v.), which describe the shouting boy who

Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls,

and that equally fine passage (*Prelude*, i.) about his voyage in the elfin pinnace on the starlit lake, when suddenly

A huge peak,<sup>1</sup> black and huge,  
As if with voluntary power instinct,  
Upreared its head,

and seemed to "stride after him," while for many  
days afterwards his brain

Worked with a dim and undetermined sense  
Of unknown modes of being,

may also be referred to this most fruitful and  
inspiring season of his life.

There is something in the absolute unconsciousness of boyish development, its instinctive reticence, its freedom from conventional restraints, its very licence to be idle and to run wild, which will do more to make a great poet than all the schools and universities in the world; and few lads enjoyed this privilege so fully as Wordsworth. What a contrast, for instance, to Cowper's life as a Westminster boy! Gifted with a strong and active frame, a passion for being in the open air, indulged with the luxury of wearing his oldest clothes (see lines on "Nutting"), and thrown among boys who never seem to have teased or laughed at him, and who even then had a certain admiration for his talents . . . "I say, Bill," said one of them, "when you write poems, do you *always* invoke the Muse?" . . . allowed frankly to be himself, and not obliged to smother anything he really felt, or pretend not to care for anything

<sup>1</sup> Wetherlam.

he really cared for, Wordsworth was indeed a fortunate boy. His brothers all went successively to the same school; his father when he came home used to encourage him to repeat long pieces of poetry—Shakspeare, Milton, and Spenser—by heart. But a sad day was coming; he has described it himself in imperishable language; how on the eve of the Christmas holidays he had gone into the fields to look out “for the led palfreys that should bear us home,” and how, sitting “scout-like” on a crag, he watched for them.

’Twas a day  
Tempestuous, dark, and wild, and on the grass  
I sate half-sheltered by a naked wall;  
Upon my right hand couched a single sheep,  
Upon my left a blasted hawthorn stood;  
With those companions at my side, I watched,  
Straining my eyes intensely, as the mist  
Gave intermitting prospect of the copse  
And plain beneath. Ere we to school returned,—  
That dreary time,—ere we had been ten days  
Sojourners in my father’s house, he died;  
And I and my three brothers, orphans then,  
Followed his body to the grave.

He contrasts the schoolboy’s eager hope with the sorrowful event, and adds—

And, afterwards, the wind and sleety rain,  
And all the business of the elements,  
The single sheep, and the one blasted tree, . . .  
The noise of wood and water, and the mist



That on the line of each of those two roads  
Advanced in such indisputable shapes ;  
All these were kindred spectacles and sounds  
To which I oft repaired, and thence would drink,  
As at a fountain ; and on winter nights,  
Down to this very time, . . . some working of the spirit,  
Some inward agitations thence are brought,  
Whate'er their office, whether to beguile  
Thoughts over-busy in the course they took,  
Or animate an hour of vacant ease.

*Prelude*, end of book xii.

John Wordsworth died in 1783, leaving his children doubly orphans, and if not absolutely penniless, yet greatly straitened for money. The bulk of their small fortune was sunk in a debt due to their father from Sir James Lowther (Earl Lonsdale), and it was not till 1802 that his successor (the new earl) honourably and promptly repaid the money.

Meanwhile his mother's family came forward to assist in sending William and Christopher to Cambridge. Dorothy went to live at Penrith with her maternal relations, and writes as follows (1787) :—

“ The affection of my brothers consoles me in all my griefs, but how soon shall I be deprived of this consolation ! . . . William and Christopher are very clever. . . . John, who is to be the sailor, has a most affectionate heart. He is not so bright as either William or Christopher, but he has very good common sense. . . . Richard, the eldest, is

equally affectionate and good, but he is far from being as clever as William. . . . Many a time have W., J., C., and myself shed tears together, tears of the bitterest sorrow. We all of us feel each day the loss we sustained when we were deprived of our parents. . . . W. has a wish to be a lawyer, if his health will permit."

Two poems belong to this early period of Wordsworth's life—the lines on leaving school, "Dear native regions," and the irregular sonnet, "Calm is all nature as a resting wheel"—in which his own characteristic manner is as apparent as in anything he afterwards wrote.

In 1787 he was sent, through the kind exertions of his relatives, to St. John's College, Cambridge. The impression the place made upon him is finely described in the *Prelude* (iii. iv. vi.) We seem to see the large-boned north country lad in his new clothes and powdered hair, with money in his pocket and a conscious pride in the new dressing-gown hanging behind his door, loitering about the streets and quadrangles, enjoying the boisterous fun of his contemporaries, the sense of being a man and to a certain extent his own master, exceeding for once—only once—in his cups, and characteristically enough in Milton's rooms, and in potations to the honour of that "temperate bard," rushing off at the sound of the bell to chapel, "shouldering up his surplice as he went," yet all the while feeling he

was "not for that hour nor for that place." Many other men must have felt that duality of existence, but perhaps even St. Augustine in his *Confessions*, that wonderful portrait of a soul in its various and almost contradictory phases, has hardly drawn it with so masterly a touch as Wordsworth.

O Heavens ! how awful is the might of souls,  
And what they do within themselves while yet  
The yoke of earth is new to them, the world  
[ Nothing but a wild field where they were sown.

*Prelude*, iii.

Side by side with his outward undergraduate life, which was not signalised by any striking academic successes, though not disgraced by any incidents or society at which he need in later days have blushed, there was going on within him a strange, perhaps an almost unexampled, fermentation, not of the passions but of the intellect. There are a few pages of the third book of the *Prelude* beginning, "Oft when the dazzling show," and ending, "As natural beings in the strength of Nature," which may be said to penetrate to the very core of the philosophy which he was hereafter to teach the world.

I looked for universal things ; perused  
The common countenance of earth and sky.

To every natural form, rock, fruits, or flower,  
Even the loose stones that cover the highway,  
I gave a moral life : I saw them feel,

Or linked them to some feeling : the great mass  
 Lay bedded in a quickening soul, and all  
 That I beheld respired with inward meaning.

I had a world about me—'twas my own ;  
 I made it, for it only lived to me,  
 And to the God who sees into the heart.

We can best perhaps understand the way in which Wordsworth's mind worked by comparing such lines as these with Shelley's beautiful description of a poet—

He will watch from dawn to gloom  
 The lake-reflected sun illumine  
 The yellow bees in the ivy bloom,  
 And hardly know what things they be ;  
 But from these create he can  
 Forms more real than living Man,  
 Nurslings of immortality !

In Shelley's mind the poet is set a-dreaming. Wordsworth's mind is not dreamy ;<sup>1</sup> he is hard-headed even in his most inspired moments. His emotions are not alive at the expense of his imagination, nor either of them at the expense of his intellect. All three are active together ; in these respects he stands as far as we know alone with the Hebrew poets and with Dante ; and it is in that that his real greatness lies. Absolute

<sup>1</sup> "There never was," says Mr. Hutton in an admirable essay, "a poet who was so little a dreamer as Wordsworth. There is volition and self-government in every line of his poetry ; and his best thoughts come from the steady resistance he opposes to the ebb and flow of ordinary desires and regrets."

truthfulness and reasonableness alike in the lofty and the low is, from the very beginning, the characteristic of his genius. How he himself felt this may be gathered from a letter written many years later, where he says :—

“The logical faculty has infinitely more to do with poetry than the young and inexperienced, whether writer or critic, ever dreams of. Indeed, as the materials upon which that faculty is exercised in poetry are so subtle, so plastic, so complex, the application of it requires an adroitness which can proceed from nothing but practice, a discernment which emotion is so far from bestowing that at first it is ever in the way of it.”<sup>1</sup>

Early in his undergraduate career the master of the College, Dr. Chevallier, dies. His uncle is sorry he did not, like so many others, try his hand at a few elegiac lines. He declines to do it, as he says himself, “I felt no interest in the deceased person.” As an old man few things worried him more than having to write an Installation Ode for Prince Albert’s visit to Cambridge. Unless he had made a thing part of himself he could do nothing with it. But no matter how simple the subject were, if it only “found” him he could show the hidden glory within it.

<sup>1</sup> To W. R. Hamilton, Esq., 24th September 1827.  
*Memoirs*, ii. 213.

We must not, however, anticipate, but open the fourth book of the *Prelude*, where his first summer vacation at Hawkshead is so graphically described. It seems as if the temporary absence had given a new vividness and a power of discrimination to his vision; he saw the lake, the church, the little garden-brook, the dear old dame, the rustic neighbours, the moon at the window, and the rough, long-backed terrier who kept such intelligent guard over him when he was versifying, as he had never seen them before. How exquisite is the description of his first walk, though on a gray, raw evening, round the lake—

But as a face we love is sweetest then  
When sorrow damps it, or, whatever look  
It chance to wear, is sweetest if the heart  
Have fulness in herself; even so with me  
It fared that evening. Gently did my soul  
Put off her veil, and, self-transmuted, stood  
Naked, as in the presence of her God.  
While on I walked, a comfort seemed to touch  
A heart that had not been disconsolate:  
Strength came where weakness was not known to be,  
At least not felt; and restoration came  
Like an intruder knocking at the door  
Of unacknowledged weariness. I took  
The balance, and with firm hand weighed myself.

Not less characteristic are the lines in the same book descriptive of his walk home after a night spent in dancing and merry-making, with "slight shocks of young love-liking interspersed."

## Magnificent

The morning rose, in memorable pomp,  
Glorious as e'er I had beheld—in front,  
The sea lay laughing at a distance ; near,  
The solid mountains shone, bright as the clouds,  
Grain-tinctured, drenched in empyrean light ;  
And in the meadows and the lower grounds  
Was all the sweetness of a common dawn—  
Dews, vapours, and the melody of birds,  
And labourers going forth to till the fields.

My heart was full ; I made no vows, but vows  
Were then made for me ; bond unknown to me  
Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,  
A dedicated spirit. On I walked  
In thankful blessedness, which yet survives.

His sister Dorothy meanwhile had left her grandmother's care and the mercer's shop, in which she appears to have occasionally served, at Penrith, and was with her uncle, Dr. Cookson, at his rectory at Forncett, in Norfolk, where she tried to employ herself by keeping a little school. "Mr. Wilberforce," she says, "has been with us for rather more than a month" (January 1789). "He allows me two guineas a year to distribute in what manner I think best for the poor." In the summer of that year the brother and sister wandered about Dovedale together, and he "made up his mind to be a poet."

There is a charming word-picture in the *Prelude* (book vi.) in which we see their two figures together framed in the Gothic window of Brougham

Castle, which they had climbed to gain a view of the fine landscape with its glimpses of Cross Fell or Helvellyn ; and the lines immediately following it are interesting as alluding to his dawning love for his distant cousin and old schoolfellow, Mary Hutchinson, his future wife—"that meek confiding heart so revered by us both."

This year, 1789, also saw the composition of his first long poem, "An Evening Walk—addressed to a young Lady" (his sister Dorothy). It is interesting on various grounds ; not the least because it contains an unconscious prophecy of his old age in its description of the "Lower Fall" at Rydal, where he little knew when penning it that that old age was to be passed. The poem happily illustrates the transition going on in his literary style. He is still under the bondage of the old Popian couplet ; some of the lines and cadences might have come out of the *Essay on Man*—his feet are still "devious," the stream still "babbles," and so forth—but there are touches of minute and loving observation of nature which are all his own : the versification may be conventional, but not one image is hackneyed or borrowed from others. "There is not an image in it" (he says) "which I have not observed ; and now in my seventy-third year I recollect the time and place where most of them were noticed."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "MSS. I. F." dictated to Isabella Fenwick in 1843.



The conclusion of the passage about Rydal Fall is as follows—

Did Sabine grace adorn my living line,  
Blandusia's praise, wild stream, should yield to thine !  
Never shall ruthless minister of death  
'Mid thy soft glooms the glittering steel unsheath ;  
No goblets shall, for thee, be crowned with flowers,  
No kid with piteous outcry thrill thy bowers ;  
The mystic shapes that by thy margin rove  
A more benignant sacrifice approve—  
A mind, that, in a calm angelic mood  
Of happy wisdom, meditating good,  
Beholds, of all from her high powers required,  
Much done, and much designed, and more desired,—  
Harmonious thoughts, a soul by truth refined,  
Entire affection for all human kind.

Viewed by themselves, these couplets might have formed part of a very respectable "Newdigate" ; looked at in the light of the author's subsequent life they offer a good deal to be "read between the lines." Few men have led such consistent lives as William Wordsworth ; to few it has been given to carry out in old age so fully the ideals of their youth.

But a new and most profoundly working influence was now to be brought to bear upon him. "Nature" was to give place to "Man." In the eventful summer of 1790 he and his friend, Robert Jones,<sup>1</sup> started for Calais on 13th July,

<sup>1</sup> Afterwards Rev. R. Jones, depicted in the lines beginning  
"I marvel how Nature could ever find space  
For so many strange contrasts in one human face"—

the eve of the day when the King swore an oath of fidelity to the new constitution.

Jones ! as from Calais southward you and I  
Went pacing side by side, this public Way  
Streamed with the pomp of a too-credulous day,  
When faith was pledged to new-born Liberty.

The two friends had £20 apiece, walking-sticks, and bundles, and so equipped they made, chiefly on foot or by water, a journey that covered enough ground to have lasted an ordinary "British tourist" for three summers. Leaving Paris on the west, they traversed France by way of Troyes and Lyons, then visited the Grande Chartreuse, Savoy, Geneva, Chamouny, the Glaciers, Martigny. They then walked over the Simplon.

Readers of the *Prelude* will recall the description of this journey in book vi.—the delight of the water transit on the Rhone and the Saône, the joyous and cordial welcome given the travellers because they were Englishmen, the hopefulness of the public mind at this auspicious moment, the threatened expulsion of the Chartreux, and yet the solemn effect of the solitudes of St. Bruno on the traveller's mind.

No one who has ever read it will forget the description of the scenes through which he then

lines interesting as specimens of a lighter style, not often so successfully attempted by Wordsworth. See also the beautiful sonnet (one of his very best) on a "Parsonage in Oxfordshire," Mr. Jones's home at Soulderne.

passed, and the sense of disappointment which he felt on finding that they had, without knowing it, "crossed the Alps!" He adds—

Our destiny, our being's heart and home,  
Is with infinitude, and only there ;  
With hope it is, hope that can never die,  
Effort, and expectation, and desire,  
And something evermore about to be.

After visiting Maggiore and Como they returned by the Splugen Pass, and wandered about the Grisons, and then in Switzerland, and then home by way of Grindelwald, Basle, and the Rhine. "We have several times," he says in a letter to his sister,<sup>1</sup> "performed a journey of thirteen leagues over the most mountainous parts of Switzerland, without any more weariness than if we had been walking an hour in the groves of Cambridge." He says in the same letter : "I have thought of you perpetually, and never have my eyes burst upon a scene of particular loveliness but I have almost instantly wished that you could for a moment be transported to the place where I stood to enjoy it. . . . I am a perfect enthusiast in my admiration of Nature in all her various forms ; and I have looked upon and, as it were, conversed with the objects which this country has presented to my view so long, and with such increasing pleasure, that the idea of parting from

<sup>1</sup> September 1790.

them oppresses me with a sadness similar to what I have always felt in quitting a beloved friend. . . . You will remember me affectionately to my uncle and aunt ; as he was acquainted with my giving up all thoughts of a fellowship he may perhaps not be so much displeased at this journey. I should be sorry if I have offended him by it. I hope my little cousin is well."

Although not yet of an age for taking Holy Orders, yet Wordsworth had been pressed by his uncle to turn his thoughts in that direction, but could not make up his mind to do so. His reluctance is to us perfectly intelligible. His mind was still in a ferment, not so much with the speculative "difficulties" which beset clever young men of our own day, as with the social problems which the outbreak of the French Revolution had brought into greater prominence. In the January of 1791 he took his B.A. degree and quitted Cambridge. Dorothy writes to her friend Miss Pollard : "My brother William was with us six [weeks] in the depth of winter. You may recollect that at that time the weather was exceedingly mild. We used to walk every morning about two hours, and every evening we went into the garden at four or half-past four, and used to pace backwards and forwards till six. Unless you have accustomed yourself to this kind of walking you will have no idea that it can be

pleasant ; but I assure you it is most delightful." He then spent two or three months in London, the experiences of which are recorded in the seventh book of the *Prelude*—

An idler, well content  
To have a house (what matter for a home ?)  
That owned him ; living cheerfully abroad,  
With unchecked fancy ever on the stir,  
And all my young affections out of doors.

He touches in his own characteristic way both the lighter and darker shades of London life—the pathetic passage about the beautiful child exposed in all his innocence to the vulgarities of the stage, and that which follows of the pain he felt on hearing, “for the first time in his life, the voice of woman utter blasphemy,” show the delicacy and tenderness which never ceased to form a part of that strong independent nature. Striking, too, is his tribute to Burke, whom he heard in the House of Commons—

Genius of Burke ! forgive the pen seduced  
By specious wonders, and too slow to tell  
Of what the ingenuous, what bewildered men,  
Beginning to mistrust their boastful guides,  
And wise men, willing to grow wiser, caught,  
Rapt auditors ! from thy most eloquent tongue,—  
Now mute, for ever mute in the cold grave.  
I see him,—old, but vigorous in age,—  
Stand like an oak whose stag-horn branches start  
Out of its leafy brow, the more to awe  
The younger brethren of the grove.

In the summer of this year he went on a tour in Wales with Mr. Jones. See the last book of the *Prelude*, with its magnificent description of a night on Snowdon—the lurcher worrying the hedgehog in the dull gloomy climb up the mountain, and the sudden glory of the moonlight view which follows it, are quite in his best manner.

Of her two brothers Dorothy writes :

“June 26, '91.

“Kit is not fond of mathematics, but has resolution sufficient to study them, because it will be impossible for him to obtain a fellowship without them. William, you may have heard, lost the chance (indeed the certainty) of a fellowship by not combating his inclinations. He gave way to his natural dislike to study so dry as many parts of mathematics, consequently could not succeed at Cambridge. He reads Italian, Spanish, French, Greek, Latin, and English, but never opens a mathematical book. . . . He wishes that I was acquainted with the Italian poets. William has a great attachment to poetry ; so indeed has Kit, but William particularly, which is not the most likely thing to produce his advancement in the world. His pleasures are chiefly of the imagination. He is never so happy as when in a beautiful country. Do not think in what I have said that he reads not at all ; for he does read

a great deal ; and not only poetry, and other languages he is acquainted with, but history," etc. etc.

On 7th December 1791 she writes : " William is arrived, I hope, by this time at Orleans, where he means to pass the winter for the purpose of learning the French language, which will qualify him for the office of travelling companion to some young gentleman, if he can get recommended. . . . He is at the same time engaged in the study of the Spanish language, and if he settles in England on his return he will begin the study of the Oriental languages."

Somewhat later Dorothy writes again to Miss Pollard :

" Christopher is no despicable poet, but he can become a mathematician also. He is not insensible to the beauty of the Greek and Latin classics, or any of the charms of elegant literature ; but he can draw his mind from these fascinating studies to others less alluring. He is steady and sincere in his attachments. William has both these virtues in an eminent degree ; and a sort of violence of affection, if I may so term it, which demonstrates itself every moment of the day, when the objects of his affection are present with him, in a sort of restless watchfulness, which I know not how to describe, a tenderness that never sleeps, and at the same time such a delicacy of manners as I have observed in few men."

On his way to Orleans in the winter of 1791-92 Wordsworth visited Paris for the first time. "France was then in a state of revolution; in the November of '91, the National Assembly met, the party of Madame Roland and the Brissotins were in the ascendant, the war of La Vendée was raging." The moment was to the youthful poet like the beginning of a golden age. He passed a few days at Paris, listened to the harangues in the National Assembly and at the club of the Jacobins, and sat in the sun among the ruins of the Bastille—

And from the rubbish gathered up a stone,  
And pocketed the relic, in the guise  
Of an enthusiast; yet, in honest truth,  
*I looked for something that I could not find,*  
*Affecting more emotion than I felt!*

At Orleans he met with the Republican general Beaupuis, who seems to have been the prototype of his fine poem of "Dion" (see also *Prelude*, ix.)

By birth he ranked  
With the most noble, but unto the poor  
Among mankind he was in service bound,  
As by some tie invisible, oaths professed  
To a religious order.

The whole passage, some pages long, is well worth study, as well as the sketch of the restless and discontented officer a little earlier in the same book of the *Prelude*.



In the autumn of '92 Wordsworth was at Paris again, just after the September massacres and the imprisonment of the King and Queen. "He describes the awe which he felt by night in the high dark lonely chamber where he lodged, when he thought of those scenes of carnage until he seemed—

To hear a voice that cried  
To the whole city, Sleep no more.

"For years afterwards they haunted his dreams. . . . At Paris his feelings were still more disturbed by the abortive issue of Louvet's denunciation of Robespierre ; he began to forebode the commencement of the Reign of Terror. . . . Happily for him" [says his nephew, the late Bishop of Lincoln, from whose *Memoirs* the above passages are quoted], "circumstances obliged him at the end of 1792 to return to England, or in all probability he would have fallen a victim among the Brissotins, with whom he was intimately connected, and who were cut off in the following May by their rivals, the Jacobins. He acknowledged that in so doing he had been rescued 'by the gracious Providence of Heaven.'"

## CHAPTER II

### RACEDOWN AND ALFOXDEN

THE year 1793 was an important one in Wordsworth's career as that of his first publication, consisting of the "Evening Walk," already mentioned, and his "Descriptive Sketches," a large portion of which was composed in his rambles on the banks of the Loire. The two poems attracted but little notice, and had a very languid sale. Yet they hit their mark. "During the last year of my residence at Cambridge," says S. T. Coleridge, "I became acquainted with Mr. Wordsworth's 'Descriptive Sketches,' and seldom, if ever, was the emergence of an original poetic genius above the literary horizon more evidently announced."

Another literary effort of this time was a letter, not published during his lifetime, to the then Bishop of Llandaff (Waters) in consequence of the latter's "Strictures on the French Revolution," etc. In it he remarks: "Have you so

little knowledge of the nature of men as to be ignorant that a time of revolution is not the season of true liberty? Alas, the obstinacy and perversion of man is such that she is too often obliged to borrow the very arms of despotism to overthrow him, and in order to reign in peace must establish herself by violence. She deploras such stern necessity, but the safety of the people, her supreme necessity, is her consolation. This apparent contradiction between the principles of liberty and the march of revolutions, this spirit of jealousy, of severity, of disquietude, of vexation, indispensable from a state of war between the oppressors and oppressed, must of necessity confuse the idea of morality, and contract the best affections of the human heart." He rejoices to think that some part of the prodigious riches of the French Church "is gone to preserve from famine some thousands of curés who were pining in villages unobserved by courts." He advocates universal suffrage, brief tenures of office, the education of the masses, the abolition of the "unnatural monster of primogeniture," and "badges of fictitious superiority."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In later days (1836) he wrote as follows as a note to a sketch of his life by Baron Field: "I am a lover of liberty, but know that liberty cannot exist apart from order; and the opinions in favour of aristocracy found in my works, the latter ones especially, all arise out of the consciousness I have that, in the present state of human knowledge, and its probable state for some ages, order cannot, and therefore liberty cannot, be maintained without degrees.

As Wordsworth, however, was soon to learn, the French Revolution failed to produce the fruits which enthusiasts had expected from it. The conduct of France towards Switzerland especially disappointed him. We may compare here the picture he afterwards drew of the disenchantment of the "Solitary" in the third book of the *Excursion*—

The shifting aims,  
The moral interests, the creative might,  
The varied functions and high attributes  
Of civil action, yielded to a power  
Formal, and odious, and contemptible.  
—In Britain ruled a panic dread of change ;  
The weak were praised, rewarded, and advanced ;  
And, from the impulse of a just disdain,  
Once more did I retire into myself.—*Despondency.*

This may be said to be the darkest moment of the young poet's life. He was disappointed in his hopes for France and for the cause of liberty, he was homeless and ill at ease with his near relations, he was all but penniless, he had voluntarily closed against himself the avenues to preferment by refusing to try for a fellowship or to read for Holy Orders, his literary efforts were not recognised by the public. A very little more, and he would have drifted in the bitterness of his soul into being a mere pamphleteer and newspaper

It is pride and presumption, and not a real love of liberty, which has made the French and the Americans so enamoured of what they call equality."

writer. Moreover, as he tells us himself, he was full of misgivings about religious and moral truth.

I lost  
All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,  
Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,  
Yielded up moral questions in despair.

This was the crisis of that strong disease,  
This the soul's last and lowest ebb ; I drooped,  
Deeming our blessèd reason of least use  
Where wanted most : " The lordly attributes  
Of will and choice," I bitterly exclaimed,  
" What are they but a mockery of a Being  
Who hath in no concerns of his a test  
Of good and evil ? " etc.—*Prelude*, xi.

In fact this chapter of his life might almost, like that in the *Sartor Resartus*, have been entitled "The Everlasting No." Happily there was one person who still clung to him, and that was his sister. They corresponded constantly ; she was his willing companion, the recipient of all his dreams, the sharer of his enthusiasms. But she was by no means one of those commonplace affectionate women who receive all and give nothing. We know the lines, so hackneyed because so true—

She gave me eyes, she gave me ears,  
And humble cares, and delicate fears,  
A heart, the fountain of sweet tears,  
And love and thought and joy.

If his genius supplied the wings, her exquisite

perceptive faculties were like the delicate antennæ, by means of which some insect discriminates and steers its course.

She not only understood him, but made him understand himself. She came back into his life after the hellish horror of the September massacres, like the return of his good angel, and with her a thousand gentle images of purity and tenderness crowded upon him as if to obliterate the dark visions of the past. No one will ever forget his tribute to her in the beautiful lines in the *Prelude*—

Then it was—

Thanks to the bounteous Giver of all good !—  
That the belovèd sister in whose sight  
Those days were passed, now speaking in a voice  
Of sudden admonition—like a brook  
That did but *cross* a lonely road, and now  
Is seen, heard, felt, and caught at every turn,  
Companion never lost through many a league—  
Maintained for me a saving intercourse  
With my true self ; . . .

Led me back through opening day  
To those sweet counsels between head and heart  
Whence grew that genuine knowledge fraught with peace.

*Prelude*, xi. not far from end.

Or the still more beautiful lines in his poem on  
"Tintern Abbey"—

Nor perchance,

If I were not thus taught, should I the more  
Suffer my genial spirits to decay ;  
For thou art with me, here, upon the banks

Of this fair river ; thou, my dearest friend,  
My dear, dear friend, and in thy voice I catch  
The language of my former heart, and read  
My former pleasures in the shooting lights  
Of thy wild eyes. Oh ! yet a little while  
May I behold in thee what I was once,  
My dear, dear sister ! And this prayer I make,  
Knowing that Nature never did betray  
The heart that loved her : 'tis her privilege,  
Through all the years of this our life, to lead  
From joy to joy : for she can so inform  
The mind that is within us, so impress  
With quietness and beauty, and so feed  
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,  
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,  
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all  
The dreary intercourse of daily life,  
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb  
Our cheerful faith that all which we behold  
Is full of blessings. Therefore let the moon  
Shine on thee in thy solitary walk ;  
And let the misty mountain winds be free  
To blow against thee : and, in after years,  
When these wild ecstasies shall be matured  
Into a sober pleasure, when thy mind  
Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,  
Thy memory be as a dwelling-place  
For all sweet sounds and harmonies ; oh ! then,  
If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,  
Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts  
Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,  
And these my exhortations ! nor, perchance,  
If I should be where I no more can hear  
Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these gleams  
Of past existence, wilt thou then forget

That on the banks of this delightful stream  
We stood together ; and that I, so long  
A worshipper of Nature, hither came,  
Unwearied in that service : rather say  
With warmer love, oh ! with far deeper zeal  
Of holier love. Nor wilt thou then forget,  
That after many wanderings, many years  
Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,  
And this green pastoral landscape, were to me  
More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake.

With these impassioned lines may be compared his sister's simpler words in one of her letters, where she says : " This favourite brother of mine happens to be no favourite with any of his near relations except his brothers, by whom he is adored. I mean John and Christopher." John was mostly at sea, and Christopher at Cambridge, plodding steadily along the academic road which was eventually, though many years afterwards, to lead him to the Mastership of Trinity. It is pleasant to find evidence in his early correspondence and down to his latest days of his consistent love for, and appreciation of, his brother and his poetry. William Wordsworth and his sister were always dreaming of setting up house together. But where was the money to come from ?

Meanwhile William spent part of the summer of 1793 in the Isle of Wight, with his friend Mr. William Calvert. Thence he went to Salisbury, where, his chaise having broken down, he wandered



alone and on foot over Salisbury Plain, gathering materials which he afterwards worked up in the "Female Vagrant."<sup>1</sup> He was lucky enough to see a bustard, and describes its flight in some fine lines.<sup>2</sup> On his way to Wales to his friend R. Jones he passed Tintern, but it was not for another five years that he was to write the magnificent poem already quoted which bears its name.

In February 1794 he writes from Halifax : "My sister is under the same roof with me ; indeed it was to see her that I came into this country. I have been doing nothing, and still continue to do nothing. What is to become of me I know not." He will not take Orders, "and as for the law, I have neither strength of mind, purse, nor constitution to engage in that pursuit."

The kindness of the Calverts pursues him. William Calvert lends the brother and sister his farm at Windybrow (Keswick), where they have a delightful time together. "Our breakfast and our supper" (says Dorothy) "are of milk and potatoes, and we drink no tea."

In July 1794 Wordsworth (as he is crossing the sands of Ulverstone) hears of the fall of Robespierre (*Prelude*, book x.) He has a moment of ecstatic hope, but it proves of short duration.

<sup>1</sup> Or "Guilt and Sorrow."

<sup>2</sup> No bustards have been seen since 1870; the last of these visitors seem to have been driven thither by the Franco-German war, but they soon became extinct.

Meanwhile his private affairs are almost desperate. The Lowther debt has never been paid, his literary schemes (especially for a periodical to be called the *Philanthropist*) have collapsed, and he is reduced to trying, hitherto without success, for a post on a London newspaper.

Meanwhile he is attending on a much-loved and dying friend, Raisley, the brother of William Calvert, who dies early in 1795, and generously bequeaths him the sum of £900.

Calvert, it must not be unheard by them  
Who may respect my name, that I to thee  
Owed many years of early liberty.

Hence, if in freedom I have loved the truth ;  
If there be aught of pure, or good, or great,  
In my past verse ; or shall be in the lays  
Of higher mood, which now I meditate ;—  
It gladdens me, O worthy, short-lived youth !  
To think how much of this will be thy praise.

£900 is after all no very exorbitant sum—less than some fashionable people would spend on a single festivity—but the bequest of it proved the turning-point in Wordsworth's life. "If it had not been," says the late Bishop of Lincoln, "for Raisley Calvert, or rather for the spirit of love moving in his heart, Wordsworth's best days might have been spent in writing leading articles for the *Courier*, and the world would never have seen the *Excursion*."

On this money, most of which was laid out at interest, with a legacy of £100 to Dorothy, and another £100 which the *Lyrical Ballads* produced, the brother and sister contrived to live for nearly eight years. After that time the payment of the Lowther debt (£8500 amongst the whole family) brought in a modest addition to their income; but when all is taken into consideration we may truly say that in choosing a poetical career Wordsworth made Poverty his bride almost as literally as St. Francis did.

It was, however, a very happy poverty. The brother and sister first set up housekeeping at Racedown Lodge, near Crewkerne, Dorset, amidst beautiful scenery, but so retired that the post came only once a week. Here they read, walked, gardened, and poetised. "I think," she said afterwards, "Racedown is the place dearest to my recollections upon the whole surface of the island; it was the first home I had." Here Wordsworth wrote his tragedy of the *Borderers*—a false start, as his genius was certainly not dramatic, and which the manager of Covent Garden was doubtless right in declining. Happily for him a new friendship was about to dawn—the friendship of his life—in the person of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

The two poets apparently met first in lodgings at Bristol, as Professor Knight tells us, probably

early in 1796, at 25 (now 51) College Street. Afterwards Coleridge came on a visit to Race-down, where the family consisted of William, Dorothy, and the little pupil Basil Montagu,<sup>1</sup> for the care of whom they received £50 a year.

"You had a great loss," she writes, "in not seeing Coleridge. He is a wonderful man. His conversation teems with soul, mind, and spirit. Then he is so benevolent, so good-tempered and cheerful, and, like William, interests himself so much about every little trifle. At first I thought him very plain, that is, for about three minutes; he is pale, thin, has a wide mouth, thick lips, and not very good teeth, longish, loose-growing, half-curling rough black hair" (in both these respects a striking contrast to his friend Wordsworth, who in his youth had beautiful teeth and light brown hair). "But if you hear him speak for five minutes you think no more of them. His eye<sup>2</sup> is large

<sup>1</sup> The original of the child in the poem—"Anecdote for Fathers"—about the weathercock.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Wordsworth's description below of the "noticeable man with large gray eyes." His own portrait immediately precedes it.

#### STANZAS

WRITTEN IN MY POCKET COPY OF THOMSON'S

"CASTLE OF INDOLENCE"

Within our happy castle there dwelt one  
Whom without blame I may not overlook;  
For never sun on living creature shone  
Who more devout enjoyment with us took:  
Here on his hours he hung as on a book;  
On his own time here would he float away,

and full and not very dark, but gray, such an eye  
as would receive from a heavy soul the dullest

As doth a fly upon a summer brook ;  
But go to-morrow—or belike to-day—  
Seek for him,—he is fled ; and whither none can say.

Ah ! piteous sight it was to see this man  
When he came back to us, a wither'd flower,  
Or like a sinful creature, pale and wan.  
Down would he sit ; and without strength or power  
Look at the common grass from hour to hour :  
And oftentimes, how long I fear to say,  
Where apple-trees in blossom made a bower,  
Retired in that sunshiny shade he lay ;  
And, like a naked Indian, slept himself away.

Great wonder to our gentle tribe it was  
Whenever from our valley he withdrew ;  
For happier soul no living creature has  
Than he had, being here the long day through.  
Some thought he was a lover, and did woo :  
Some thought far worse of him, and judg'd him wrong :  
But verse was what he had been wedded to ;  
And his own mind did like a tempest strong  
Come to him thus, and drove the weary wight along.

With him there often walk'd in friendly guise,  
Or lay upon the moss by brook or tree,  
A noticeable man with large gray eyes,  
And a pale face that seemed undoubtedly  
As if a blooming face it ought to be ;  
Heavy his low-hung lip did oft appear,  
Depress'd by weight of musing phantasy ;  
Profound his forehead was, though not severe ;  
Yet some did think that he had little business here :

Sweet heaven forfend ! his was a lawful right ;  
Noisy he was, and gamesome as a boy ;  
His limbs would toss about him with delight,  
Like branches when strong winds the trees annoy.  
Nor lack'd his calmer hours device or toy  
To banish listlessness and irksome care ;

expression, but it speaks every emotion of his animated mind ; it has more of the 'poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling' than I ever witnessed. He has fine dark eyebrows, and an overhanging forehead. The first thing that was read after he came was William's new poem ('Ruined Cottage')<sup>1</sup> with which he was much delighted, and after tea he repeated to us two acts and a half of his tragedy *Osorio*.<sup>2</sup> The next morning William read his tragedy the *Borderers*." Coleridge was no less enthusiastic about his new friends. "We are three people but only one soul," he observed

He would have taught you how you might employ  
Yourself ; and many did to him repair,—  
And, certes, not in vain ; he had inventions rare.  
Expedients, too, of simplest sort he tried :  
Long blades of grass, pluck'd round him as he lay,  
Made—to his ear attentively applied—  
A pipe on which the wind would deftly play—  
Glasses he had, that little things display,—  
The beetle with his radiance manifold,  
A mailed angel on a battle-day ;  
And cups of flowers, and herbage green and gold ;  
And all the gorgeous sights which fairies do behold.  
He would entice that other man to hear  
His music and to view his imagery :  
And, sooth, these two did love each other dear  
As far as love in such a place could be ;  
There did they dwell—from earthly labour free,  
As happy spirits as were ever seen :  
If but a bird, to keep them company,  
Or butterfly sate down, they were, I ween,  
As pleased as if the same had been a maiden queen.

<sup>1</sup> The nucleus of the *Excursion*.

<sup>2</sup> Afterwards known as *Remorse*.

on a later occasion. Of Wordsworth he says: "I feel a little man by his side." Again, "When I speak in the terms of admiration due to his intellect, I fear lest those terms should keep out of sight the amiableness of his manners. He has written near 1200 lines of blank verse, superior, I hesitate not to aver, to anything in our language which in any way resembles it." In 1797 he writes also to his friend Cottle, the Bristol publisher:—

"Wordsworth and his exquisite sister are with me. She is a woman indeed, in mind, I mean, and in heart; for her person is such that if you expected to see a pretty woman you would think her ordinary; if you expected to see an ordinary woman you would think her pretty, but her manners are simple, ardent, impressive. In every motion her innocent soul beams out so brightly that who saw her would say 'Guilt' was a thing impossible with her.' Her information various; her eye watchful in minutest observation of nature; and her taste a perfect electrometer."

It may interest the unscientific reader to know that an electrometer is an instrument for gauging the amount of electricity in any given body, and is evidently used here to convey the idea of great delicacy of perception.

Those who knew Dorothy Wordsworth testify to her quickness of observation as well as her

extreme sensitiveness of feeling. A portrait of her in old age represents a squarer, broader face than that of the poet (more like that of her nephew Christopher the late Bishop of Lincoln<sup>1</sup>), the eyes are full of shrewd and humorous observation, and the mouth gives the impression of one who could if she chose give effective utterance to it. Indications of her readiness and practical sense frequently occur both in her journals and elsewhere, and her helpful sympathy for the poor (as long afterwards in the case of Agnes Green who was snowed up at Blentarn Ghyll) was a noticeable feature in her character. Many years after (1832) her brother, speaking of her illness, wrote : " Were she to depart, the Phasis of my moon would be robbed of light to a degree that I have not courage to think of."

In 1797 Wordsworth migrated to Alfoxden

<sup>1</sup> A survivor of Rydal days describes her as " of middle height, with a slight figure ; she was very active in movement. Her features were rather small, she had dark hair and gray eyes, with a very bright expression of countenance." In this and the gipsy colour of her skin, which was no doubt partly due to her out-of-door habits, as well as in her extreme rapidity of look and movement, she must also have been like the nephew already mentioned. When her brother would say, " We must be going," in his deliberate way, she would start up and respond, " Yes, let us go," and be off at once. I think it was Lady Richardson who once described to me an absurd little scene of the poet and Mrs. Hemans having a discussion—no doubt on art or literature—while Dorothy was tearing up breadths of calico in the background.

" My dear Dorothy," began the poet in his slow expostulating tones, " my *dear* Dorothy !"

" Well !" quickly responded she, " at all events *I'm* doing something useful, which is more than *you* are !"



near Nether Stowey, where Coleridge and his wife were then living, in order to be near him. It was a "large mansion with furniture enough for a dozen families like ours," says Dorothy in a charming letter which unhappily there is no room to transcribe. . . . "The Tor of Glastonbury is before our eyes during more than half of our walk to Stowey ; and in the park wherever we go . . . it makes a part of our prospect." "It was," says Wordsworth, "a very pleasant and productive time of my life."

In getting to know Coleridge his social circle was considerably enlarged, and came to include Southey, Cottle, T. Poole, Lamb, Mackintosh, Thelwall, and Bowles. Meanwhile his poetical gifts seemed to be bursting into flower with all the rapidity of a kindly spring. Such poems as "The Thorn," "Simon Lee" (the original lived in Alfoxden Park), "The Last of the Flock," "The Idiot Boy," "Expostulation and Reply," "Tables Turned," "I heard a thousand blended notes," "It is the first mild day of March," etc., were the offspring of this genial season, when Coleridge was also in full song, as the exquisite beginning of "Christabel" shows. Wordsworth was planning the "Recluse," the poem of which the *Excursion* was to form the middle portion, while it was to be introduced by the *Prelude*. Only a fragment of the

"Recluse" was ever written, and even that fragment was only published in its entirety in 1888, nearly a century after its composition. Wordsworth writes most characteristically to Mr. Losh: "I have written 706 lines of a poem *which I hope to make of considerable utility*. Its title will be 'The Recluse, or Views of Nature, Man, and Society.'"

This peculiar matter-of-factness of Wordsworth's phraseology in early life reminds one of his telling Harriet Martineau many years later that the "Happy Warrior" contained "many extremely valuable thoughts." It may be doubted if any man ever existed in whom high inspiration lay so close to the baldest prose. To come across it is like looking at a mountain over a dusty roadside hedge, but the artist who left it out would mar the fidelity of the picture. We are told that the "Ancient Mariner" was planned to defray the expenses of a walking tour in the Valley of Stones. It was founded on a dream of Coleridge's friend Mr. Cruikshank. Wordsworth's recent reading suggested the slaying of the albatross as the crime which was to be avenged, and he also suggested the navigation of the ship by the dead men, but Coleridge had the lion's share of the work. "Our respective manners," says William Wordsworth, "proved so widely different that it would have been quite presumptuous in me to do anything but separate from an

undertaking upon which I could only have been a clog." It was thus, however, that the idea of the *Lyrical Ballads* grew up, "of poems chiefly on supernatural subjects, taken from common life, but looked at as much as might be through an imaginative medium." Coleridge, who was, as is well known, conversant to a degree rare in those days with German literature and philosophy, was to supply the poems in which the exceptional or supernatural element predominated. Wordsworth's aim was rather to bring out the poetical and imaginative side of everyday life. In doing this it must be confessed that he sometimes ran in the teeth, not only of the conventionalities of the day, but of the canons of good taste which belong alike to all ages.<sup>1</sup> We can hardly suppose that Horace would have been less shocked than an *Edinburgh Reviewer* by such lines as—

A household tub, like one of those  
Which women use to wash their clothes,  
This carried the blind boy.

Still, human nature being what it is, perhaps it will always be necessary for the founder of a new school to overstate his own case, to startle the world into attention by paradoxes, and if necessary to make them listen to him even by something like an act of violence.

<sup>1</sup> Cp. the well-known parody "The Baby's Début," *Rejected Addresses* (1812).

Of the poems belonging to this period "We are Seven" was one of the most important. It had been lying dormant in the author's mind for four years, ever since 1793, when he saw the little girl at Goderich Castle, near the Wye. The "dear brother Jem" whose name Coleridge irreverently introduced into the first stanza was James Tobin, brother of the dramatist, who, Wordsworth tells us, said "there was one poem in the new volume which he earnestly entreated him to cancel, for it would make him everlastingly ridiculous." This was "We are Seven." "'Nay,' said I, 'that shall take its chance, however.' And he left me in despair. 'The Idiot Boy' was suggested by the words 'The cocks did crow,' etc., reported to me 'by my dear friend Thomas Poole,' the last stanza being the foundation of the whole." Undismayed by the rejection of his tragedy (December 1797), Wordsworth still went on pouring forth, or, as he said in his usually matter-of-fact language, "very rapidly adding to my stock of poetry." Perhaps his poetical powers may be said to have been nearly at their highest point in the summer of 1798, when, during a tour with his sister on the Wye, he produced the beautiful lines already quoted on "Tintern Abbey," which are as perfect in workmanship as they are spiritual in tone and fresh and poetical in conception. Such lines as—

Hedgerows, 'hardly hedgerows, little lines  
Of sportive wood run wild,

or—

Those best portions of a good man's life,  
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts  
Of kindness and of love,

or—

That blessed mood,  
In which the burthen of the mystery,  
In which the heavy and the weary weight  
Of all this unintelligible world,  
Is lightened :—that serene and blessed mood,  
In which the affections gently lead us on,—  
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame  
And even the motion of our human blood  
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep  
In body, and become a living soul :  
While with an eye made quiet by the power  
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,  
We see into the life of things :—

such lines as these are as characteristic as they  
are unforgettable.

“Not a line of it was altered,” he says, “and not  
any part of it written down till I reached Bristol.”  
It was published in the volume of *Lyrical Ballads*  
almost immediately afterwards, early in September  
1798, by Joseph Cottle of Bristol, whose friendship  
for both Coleridge and Wordsworth has already  
been mentioned, and who gave Wordsworth thirty  
guineas for his share of copyright. Had the lines  
on “Tintern Abbey” been the only poem of any  
mark in the whole book, the *Lyrical Ballads* would

have been well worth having ; but the public of those days was of a different opinion, and we find poor Mr. Cottle some time afterwards, when he parted with his copyrights to Messrs. Longman, obtaining their permission to return that of the *Lyrical Ballads* to the authors as *worth nothing*!

Meanwhile Wordsworth was writing "Peter Bell," which was not, however, published till twenty years later. It may not perhaps be out of place to add here a sketch of him from the pen of Hazlitt, which belongs to the Alfoxden period.

He says : " In the afternoon Coleridge took me to Alfoxden. . . . Wordsworth himself was from home, but his sister kept house for him, and set before us a frugal repast, and we had free access to her brother's poems, the *Lyrical Ballads*, which were still in manuscript. I dipped into a few of them with great satisfaction, and with the faith of a novice. I slept that night in an old room with blue hangings, and covered with the round-faced family portraits of the age of George I. and II, and from the wooded declivity of the adjoining park that overlooked my window at the dawn of day could 'hear the loud stag speak.'<sup>1</sup> That morning, as soon as breakfast was over, we strolled into the park, and seating ourselves on the branch of an old oak tree, Coleridge read aloud, with a sonorous and musical voice, the ballad of ' Betty

<sup>1</sup> Ben Jonson.

Foy." Of the "new spirit of poetry" in some of the other ballads he says: "It had to me something of the effect that arises from the turning up of the fresh soil, or the first welcome breath of spring." . . .

"The next day W. arrived from Bristol at Coleridge's cottage. I think I see him now. He answered in some degree to his friend's description of him, but was more gaunt and Don Quixote like. He was quaintly dressed in a brown fustian jacket and striped pantaloons. There was something of a roll, a lounge, in his gait, not unlike his own Peter Bell. There was a severe worn presence of thought about his temples, a fire in his eye (as if he saw something in objects more than the outward appearance), an intense high narrow forehead [this, we may note, is hardly accurate], a Roman nose, cheeks furrowed by strong purpose and feeling, and a convulsive inclination to laughter about the mouth a good deal at variance with the solemn stately expression of the rest of his face. . . . Haydon's head of him, introduced in the Entrance of Christ into Jerusalem, is the most like his drooping weight of thought and expression. He sat down and talked very naturally and freely, with a mixture of clear gushing accents in his voice, a deep guttural intonation, and a strong tincture of the northern burr, like the crust in wine. . . . Looking out of

the low-latticed window he said : ' How beautifully the sun *sits on that yellow bank.*' . . . There is a chant in the recitation both of Coleridge and Wordsworth which acts as a spell upon the hearer and disarms the judgment. . . . The one might be termed dramatic, the other more lyrical. Coleridge has told me that he himself liked to compose in walking over uneven ground, or breaking through the straggling copses of a pine wood, whereas Wordsworth always wrote, if he could, walking up and down on a straight gravel walk, or in some spot where the continuity of his verse met with no collateral interruptions."

Shortly after this the Wordsworths gave up their Alfoxden house ; not, however, as has sometimes been alleged, because they had been made uneasy there in consequence of his supposed political opinions and his acquaintance with Thelwall, rumours of which had caused a spy to be sent down to that part of the world. " The facts," he says, " came not to my knowledge till I had left the neighbourhood. I was not refused a continuance ; I never applied for one."<sup>1</sup>

Soon after the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth and his sister paid a visit to Hamburg, where he met the poet Klopstock, and had some conversation with him on German

<sup>1</sup> For further details the reader may advantageously consult Professor Knight's *Life*.



literature and philosophy. Klopstock praised Wieland very highly. Wordsworth, who had just read the *Oberon*, apparently in a translation, complained of the sensuality with which the passion of love was treated throughout the poem. "Well, but," said Klopstock, "you see that such poems please everybody." "I answered that it was the province of a great poet to raise people up to his own level, not to descend to theirs. He agreed, and confessed that on no account whatsoever would he have written a work like the *Oberon*."

The winter of 1798-99, the coldest in the century, was spent by the brother and sister at Goslar, at the foot of the Hartz Mountains, which were covered with an extensive forest. Coleridge, meanwhile, was studying the German language at Ratzeburg, where he had far greater advantages for that purpose. Nothing could have been much drearier than this time at Goslar. Wordsworth has himself told us the people of the house informed him they thought some night he would be frozen to death in his bedroom. The one touch of cheerfulness was in the beautiful kingfisher which flitted by him in his solitary walks on the old city rampart.

It is interesting to see how his mind, thus thrown in on itself, reverted to old times and old scenes, and to learn that some of his sweetest and most exquisite poems sprang out of this ice-bound

soil. "She dwelt among the untrodden ways," "A slumber did my spirit seal," "Strange fits of passion," "Three years she grew," "The Poet's Epitaph," "Lucy Gray," the group of "Matthew" poems, the lines on "Nutting," and those already referred to, "Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe," "There was a boy, ye knew him well,"—in fact many of the poems which have endeared him most to posterity, and which have most of the springtide and April beauty of his nature in them, were composed when the temperature was below freezing-point, or in the presence of a hideous black German stove, with the Brunswicker horse impressed upon it, instead of the

"Loved presence of his cottage fire,  
Or kettle whispering its faint undersong,"

which, as he has told us himself, were his favourite surroundings. No wonder then, in getting out of Goslar, 10th February 1799, he poured forth an impassioned hymn of delight, the opening lines of the *Prelude*—

Oh, there is blessing in this gentle breeze,  
A visitant that while it fans my cheek  
Doth seem half-conscious of the joy it brings!

and prepared to turn his steps towards England and home.

I travelled among unknown men,  
In lands beyond the sea;  
Nor, England! did I know till then  
The love I bore to thee.

## CHAPTER III

### EARLY GRASMERE DAYS—1799-1802

IT was on the shortest day of the last month of the last year of the eventful eighteenth century that William and Dorothy Wordsworth took up their abode at the little cottage at Town End, Grasmere. On that short St. Thomas's Day they had ended a four days' journey—much of it on foot—from Sockburn, Richmond, and Wensleydale, in a bleak biting cold. Yet a letter written by Wordsworth to Coleridge contains an enthusiastic description of the Aysgarth and Hardraw Waterfalls seen on the way, of which the close is as follows: "I cannot express to you the enchanting effect produced by this Arabian scene of colour, as the wind blew aside the great waterfall behind which we stood, and alternately hid and revealed each of these fairy cataracts in irregular succession, or displayed them with various gradations of distinctness as the intervening spray was thickened or dispersed. What a scene, too, in summer! *In*

*the luxury of our imagination we could not help feeding upon the pleasure which this cave, in the heat of a July noon, would spread through a frame exquisitely sensible.* That huge rock on the right, the bank winding round on the left with all its living foliage, and the breeze stealing up the valley and bedewing the cavern with the freshest imaginable spray ; and then the murmur of the water, the quiet, and the seclusion of a long summer day."

The possession of such an imagination is indeed a luxury, in the midst of a "task of twenty-one miles on a short winter's day,"<sup>1</sup> all on foot except a "lift" from a passing empty cart, while the bitter cold and driving storm alternating with bursts of sunshine must have been almost worse than the fatigue. How few women, with the cares of getting into a new house before them, added to the physical discomforts of the journey, would have been able to throw themselves into the spirit of the moment as Dorothy seems to have done !

The frosty wind, as if to make amends  
For its keen breath, was aiding to our steps,  
And drove us onward like two ships at sea,  
Or like two birds, companions in mid-air,  
Parted and reunited by the blast.  
Stern was the face of nature ; we rejoiced

---

<sup>1</sup> It was on this journey that the poem on "Hart-leap Well" was suggested.

In that stern countenance, for our souls thence drew  
A feeling of their strength. The naked trees,  
The icy brooks, as on we passed, appeared  
To question us. "Whence come ye, to what end?"

*Recluse, book i.*

How significant and full of suggestiveness is the picture of these two storm-driven figures, settling down at length by the tiny rustic fireside at Grasmere. "Dove Cottage," an abode as humble as that of any labouring man, is still standing by the roadside, close to the lake, with a garden which is already the beginning of a mountain climb, and where some of the plants which Wordsworth set may haply still be found; the "gowan" was there only last year, close to the "rocky well."

To our minds the antithesis is most impressive between the reign of artificiality and false taste, the faded glories of worn-out institutions, of literary traditions run to seed, of the stifling atmosphere of conventionality and unreality which had characterised the just-departing century, and the new and fresh buds of genius which were already peeping up among its withered, wind-blown and down-trodden leafage.

The absolute simplicity, the unaffected stainless love, the instinctive truthfulness and unboastful but hardy manliness which were to be sheltered beneath that insignificant roof have had no

small share in the regeneration of English society and all that English society influences through its literature, its art, its philosophy, and even its theology. The light in that little cottage at Town End has thrown its beams far and wide like Portia's candle, perhaps we may say almost as far as that of Bishop Latimer himself.

It is seldom that we see poetry in its very moment of crystallisation as we do here. By the aid of Dorothy's journal we know the very day, almost the hour, in which the brother and sister walked by the lake side, or noticed a group of beggars, an old man gathering leeches, talked over their childish recollections, observed some beautiful spectacle of nature standing side by side. One or two extracts must suffice.

"*Friday, October 3, 1800.*—Very rainy all the morning. William walked to Ambleside after dinner. I went with him part of the way. When William and I returned from accompanying Jones we met an old man almost double. His face was interesting. He was of Scotch parents, but had been born in the army. He had a wife, 'a good woman, and it pleased God to bless us with ten children.' All these were dead but one, of whom he had not heard for many years, a sailor. His trade was to gather leeches, but now leeches were scarce, and he had not strength for it. He had been hurt in driving a cart, his leg broke, his body

driven over, his skull fractured ; he felt no pain till he recovered from his first insensibility. *It was then late in the evening, when the light was going away.*"

This last sentence seems to put us into a suitable key for reading the poem itself, just as the first, describing the heavy rain of the morning, has been reproduced in the fine opening of what must always be considered one of Wordsworth's noblest minor poems. Any one who happens to have seen the somewhat commonplace roadside pond where the original leech-gatherer stood will feel indeed the truth of Wordsworth's own saying—

Minds that have nothing to confer  
Find little to perceive.

"*Saturday, March 4(?)*, 1802. — W. wrote the poem of the 'Beggar Woman,' taken from a woman whom I had seen nearly two years ago when he was absent at Gallow Hill and had thus described. . . . After tea I read W. the account I had written of the little boy belonging to the tall woman ; and an unlucky thing it was, for he could not escape from those very words.

"Next morning at breakfast he wrote the poem 'To a Butterfly.' The thought came upon him as we were talking about the pleasure we always felt at the sight of a butterfly. I told him that I used in my childhood to chase them, but was afraid of *brushing the dust off their wings.*"

The exquisite description of the daffodils has been too often quoted for reproduction here.

"*Tuesday, April 20.*—W. wrote conclusion of the poem 'To a Butterfly'—'I've watched you.' Coleridge came."

"*Wednesday, April 28.*—Copied the 'Prioress's Tale.' W. in the orchard—tired. I happened to say that when a child I would not have pulled a *strawberry blossom*: left him, and wrote out the 'Manciple's Tale.' At dinner he came in with the poem on children gathering flowers ('Foresight')."

"*April 30.*—We went into the orchard after breakfast, and sat there. The lake calm, sky cloudy. W. began poem on the 'Celandine.'"

"*May 1.*—Sowed flower seeds. W. helped me. We sat in the orchard. W. wrote the 'Celandine.' Planned an arbour; the sun too hot for us."

"*May 7.*—W. wrote the 'Leech-Gatherer'" [this, it will be observed, was nineteen months after the incident itself].

"*May 21.*—W. wrote two sonnets on 'Buona parte' after I had read Milton's sonnets to him."

"*May 29.*—W. wrote his poem on going to M(ary) H(utchinson). I wrote it out."

"*June 8.*—W. wrote the poem 'The Sun has long been set.'"

"*June 17.*—W. added to the Ode he is writing ('Childhood and Immortality')."



"June 19.—Read Churchill's *Rosciad*."

It may be mentioned that this journal is full of allusions to William's being "ill," "tired," and the like. He certainly was not one of "the mob of gentlemen who wrote with ease." The task of composition seems to have been frequently attended with physical discomfort and uneasiness, and especially to have affected his sleep, as his poems themselves show.<sup>1</sup> He hated writing, and wrote a large loose irregular hand. His eyes were ill suited for close literary application, and his whole frame thoroughly unfitted for a sedentary life.

At the close of this summer, 4th October 1802, he was married to Mary Hutchinson, having previously with his sister paid a short visit to France. The inimitable sonnet on "Westminster Bridge" was composed on the roof of the Dover coach (30th July, 1802). His sister says: "Arrived at Calais at four in the morning of 31st July. Delightful walks in the evenings, seeing far off in

<sup>1</sup> On one occasion he received a wound in his foot (while engaged in the composition of the "White Doe of Rylstone"), "and though I desisted from walking, I found that the irritation of the wounded part was kept up by the act of composition, to a degree that made it necessary to give my constitution a holiday. A rapid cure was the consequence. Poetic excitement has throughout my life brought on more or less bodily derangement. Nevertheless I am at the close of my seventy-third year in what may be called excellent health. . . . But, perhaps I ought to add that my labour has been generally carried on out of doors."—MSS. I. F. *Memoirs*, ii. 55.

the west the coast of England like a cloud, crested with Dover Castle, the evening star, and the glory of the sky ; the reflections in the water were more beautiful than the sky itself, purple waves brighter than precious stones for ever melting away upon the sand." Compare the sonnet—

Fair Star of evening, splendour of the west,  
Star of my country,

and other sonnets bearing the same date which follow it.<sup>1</sup>

Before leaving Grasmere he had composed an exquisite poem—

Farewell, thou little nook of mountain-ground,  
in which he had anticipated a happy return to  
Grasmere with his bride. Those anticipations

<sup>1</sup> MS. letter, Christopher Wordsworth to J. Walton. Windsor, 13th September 1802.

[After mentioning the safe arrival in the Downs of the *Earl of Abergavenny*, of which he had heard in his brother Richard's chambers in Staple Inn.] "The next piece of intelligence, even more unexpected, was that my brother William and sister were in town, having arrived a few days before from Calais. They had been spending about a month in the neighbourhood of that place, and seemed very glad to get home again. William is not yet married, but the ceremony will take place, we expect, in about ten days' time. We continued in London till the Thursday morning, expecting daily and almost hourly to hear of John's arrival at the India House. But finding on the Wednesday evening that the ship . . . was likely to be detained . . . near Margate by the neap tides, my brother William, my sister, and myself set off for Windsor to see my uncle [Cookson] and his family. . . . The cloisters I found very empty. . . . The Royal family, excepting the Queen, who is in bad health, are on the terrace every evening. The King is as hearty and well as ever."

were more than fulfilled. Mary Wordsworth was the very complement of his own being. She brought an element of repose and stability into his life; her nature less highly strung, her intellect less brilliant and stimulating than that of his sister, had a depth, good sense, and wisdom, a loving fidelity of its own which proved the constant blessing of his life. The present writer remembers her in later days, cheerful, clear-headed, and active even in old age and blindness, affectionate and kindly in manner, with that straightforward, outspoken simplicity which is so attractive to children, unaffectedly and naturally religious, a wholesome-minded woman whose sincerity gave value to her tenderness.

We may briefly refer to the group of poems which were specially connected with her. For my own part I should not be indisposed to include in them those exquisite lines on "Lucy" (in spite of the fact that Lucy is said to be "in her grave") which he composed at Goslar. He had known Mary Hutchinson long before, even from childhood, and "Lucy" is a two-syllable word which could very easily be substituted for "Mary," just as we know "Emmeline" was for "Dorothy." It may be observed, however, once for all, that poets are not nearly so matter-of-fact as their critics, who expect to have time, place, and person to show for every stanza. The poet's vision is not

that of a policeman with a bull's-eye lantern. His personages could very often prove an *alibi* in a court of law. Nay, he frequently invests one character or locality with some of the attributes of another, and no greater injustice can be done to him or them than to tie everything down to rigid literalism. For instance, "She was a Phantom of delight" was, by his own confession, half inspired by the "Highland Girl" and half by his own wife. It may be added, too, that Wordsworth was in all things a man of rare consistency of character and constancy of purpose. Where he once loved he loved always. His political convictions, which outwardly seemed to change, were in reality only following their natural laws of development. He grew, but he never was false to himself and his early ideals. Still more was this the case with his affections. The gifted sister of his youth did not cease to be dear to him when enfeebled by old age and illness. Every page of his correspondence bears witness to his love for his wife. The poem inspired by her, "She was a Phantom of delight," one of the most perfect descriptions of a true woman that ever was penned, despite the flaw in it made by that unfortunate line—

The very pulse of the machine,

may be compared with the lines at the conclusion of the *Prelude*—

She came, no more a phantom to adorn  
A moment, but an inmate of the heart,  
And yet a spirit, there for me enshrined  
To penetrate the lofty and the low;  
Even as one essence of pervading light  
Shines, in the brightest of ten thousand stars  
And the meek worm that feeds her lowly lamp  
Couched in the dewy grass.

The lines in the dedication to the "White Doe of Rylstone" contain a pathetic allusion to the loss of their two children, and we may also connect with her the poems, "Let other bards of angels sing" and "Yes! thou art fair," the "Ode to Lycoris," and above all the beautiful and most characteristic poem, "O dearer far than light and life are dear," with the stanza at the close—

Peace settles where the intellect is meek,  
And Love is dutiful in thought and deed;  
Through Thee communion with that Love I seek:  
The Faith Heaven strengthens where He moulds the Creed.

See also the following beautiful poem from those on the "Naming of Places":—

V

TO M. H.

Our walk was far among the ancient trees;  
There was no road, nor any woodman's path;  
But the thick umbrage, checking the wild growth  
Of weed and sapling, on the soft green turf  
Beneath the branches, of itself had made  
A track, which brought us to a slip of lawn,

And a small bed of water in the woods.  
All round this pool both flocks and herds might drink  
On its firm margin, even as from a well,  
Or some stone basin which the herdsman's hand  
Had shaped for their refreshment ; nor did sun  
Or wind from any quarter ever come  
But as a blessing to this calm recess,  
This glade of water and this one green field.  
The spot was made by Nature for herself ;  
The travellers know it not, and 'twill remain  
Unknown to them ; but it is beautiful ;  
And if a man should plant his cottage near,  
Should sleep beneath the shelter of its trees,  
And blend its waters with his daily meal,  
He would so love it, that in his death hour  
Its image would survive among his thoughts :  
And therefore, my sweet Mary, this still nook,  
With all its beeches, we have named from you.

Other references to his wife may be found in the two sonnets " To a Painter " (Margaret Gillies) and his often-quoted sonnets written at Oxford in 1820, " Ye sacred nurseries of blooming youth " and " Shame on this faithless heart."

Above all it has been recorded to " Mary's " eternal honour that she composed the two best lines in the " Daffodils "—

They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude.

She herself would have been doubtless the first to admit that the thought had been already in the lines on " Tintern Abbey "—

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These beauteous forms,  
Through a long absence, have not been to me  
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye, etc.

But it is not every wife that can so identify herself with her husband's way of thinking, feeling, and expressing himself.

Their home at Grasmere, where Dorothy still lived with them, was a great contrast to many other poets' homes in the thorough happiness of their wedded life, and during a long union of nearly fifty years, through joy and sorrow, their affection remained serene and unclouded.

## CHAPTER IV

### MATURITY—1802-1805

AT the time of his marriage Wordsworth was a little more than thirty-two years of age, and fast approaching the meridian of his powers. The "sturm und drang" period inaugurated by the French Revolution had given place to one of equal vigour but of less unrest, and the full masculine force of his mind is never more conspicuous than in the poems which he wrote during the first ten years of his residence at Grasmere.

At the head of the list must be placed the glorious Ode, "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," which is the high-water mark of his poetic genius.

Two years at least, he tells us, elapsed between the writing of the first four stanzas and the remaining part, "Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting."

It is not unlikely that his own novel experience of fatherhood (his eldest boy, John, was born in



1803, and the poem not concluded till 1806 at earliest, and that most wonderful mystery, the development of a little child, must have been constantly in his thoughts) may have coloured the latter portion of this magnificent poem, especially the exquisite sketch of "the child among his new-born blisses," and the stately, nay, solemn apostrophe, "Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie," etc.

"I used to brood," he says, speaking of his own childhood, "over the stories of Enoch and Elijah, and almost to persuade myself that, whatever might become of others, I should be translated in something of the same way to heaven.<sup>1</sup> With a feeling congenial to this I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or a tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality. . . ." Speaking of the kindred idea of pre-existence "as an ingredient in Platonic philosophy," he adds: "When I was impelled to write this poem . . . I took hold of the idea of pre-existence as having sufficient foundation in humanity for

<sup>1</sup> Compare "We are Seven" and the well-known lines of Vaughan—

"Happy those early days when I  
Shined in my angel-infancy."

authorising me to make for my purpose the best use of it I could as a poet." <sup>1</sup>

These years saw also the completion of the *Prelude* and the composition of the greater part of the *Excursion*—the former not destined to be published till after the author's death, the latter in 1814. These poems will be for ever associated with the lovely green valley of Easedale, through which the beck of the same name flows, descending from Sour Milk Ghyll in a torrent of white foam on its way to join the Rotha at Grasmere. Beside it a gradually ascending terrace of soft green turf intermixed with gray rocks and bracken leads from Lancrigg to Easedale Tarn, and below is a grassy meadow, not unlike those sometimes seen in Switzerland, which in early summer is full of luxuriant large white daisies and other wild flowers. In the little valley is one white cottage with a yew tree beside it, which seems to give a human pathos and reality to the solitude.

The mountains are wrapped about the valley on every side ; neyer do they appear lovelier than just at sunset to any one looking up it from the little bridge below Lancrigg, while the meadow grass is still full of golden light, and the rich sunset clouds lie behind the purple, gray, and violet ridges which shut the valley in, and contrast with the gleaming white foam of the mountain

<sup>1</sup> MSS. I. F. *Memoirs*, i. 190.

stream which has forced its way through them. Yet when night has settled down on the hills, and the glory of moonlight or starlight is in the sky, and the owls are hooting from their hiding-places, and the murmur of unseen waterfalls makes itself heard through the soft but not unbroken stillness, he who looks and listens may feel even more than by daylight the presence of the "genius of the place," that genius who waited for thousands of years till its interpreter came, and who is waiting now for a response from the hearts of those to whom that interpreter's voice is dear. Along that green pathway hundreds of lines were murmured by the poet—lines, many of them, which were not to become vocal to the world till he who uttered them was silent. Few poets have been so happy in their surroundings, few so fortunate in the sympathy of their homes. Near him, on the hillside, sat his wife or his sister, ready to write down his words : ready, we may be sure, with eager tones and responsive looks. Their sympathy encircled his mind like the corona of light round some luminous orb, in which it seems to diffuse and magnify itself ; and if some are tempted to think that Wordsworth would have been better without this close and constant fellowship of admiring and approving love, let them be asked to remember how chilly and foggy was the atmosphere he had to encounter outside—the

atmosphere of *Edinburgh Reviewers*, of clever and fashionable critics, or of complete indifference. "Sometimes they would deride, sometimes they would chide, and sometimes they would quite neglect him," said John Bunyan of his Pilgrim, and it was equally true of the author of the *Excursion*. Even he could hardly help contrasting the reception he met with from the public with that of another rising genius, Mr., afterwards Sir Walter, Scott.

The two poets had met in the year 1803, when William and Dorothy were on a tour in Scotland, which her charming journal (since published by Principal Shairp) has commemorated, and which found echoes in some of his most striking poems. "The Highland Girl," "Stepping Westward," and "The Solitary Reaper"—all of these have a *spirituality* which is unsurpassable. On part of this tour Coleridge was their companion, but the rain was too much for him, and he left them and went his way to Edinburgh.

The following fine passage from Dorothy's journal is full of the spirit of the Highlands: "We had three miles to walk to Tarbet; it rained, but not heavily; the mountains were not concealed from us by the mists, but appeared larger and more grand; twilight was coming on, and the obscurity under which we saw the objects, with the sounding of the torrents,

kept our minds alive and wakeful ; all was solitary and huge ; sky, water, and mountains mingled together. While we were walking forward, the road leading us over the top of a brow, we all stopped suddenly at the sound of a half-articulate Gaelic hooting from the field close to us. It came from a little boy, whom we could see on the hill between us and the lake, wrapped up in a gray plaid. He was probably calling home the cattle for the night. His appearance was in the highest degree moving to the imagination ; mists were on the hillsides, darkness shutting in upon the huge avenue of mountains, torrents roaring, no house in sight to which the child might belong, his dress, cry, and appearance all different from anything we had been accustomed to ; it was a text, as William has since observed to me, containing in itself the whole history of the Highlander's life—his melancholy, his simplicity, his poverty, his superstition, and above all that visionariness which results from a communion with the unworldliness of nature."

Kilchurn Castle, the Pass of Glencoe, Blair Athole, and the Pass of Killiecrankie, the burying-place of Ossian, the "Narrow Glen," Loch Katrine and Rob Roy, the "Highland Reaper," Nidpath Castle and the Braes of Yarrow, all find a place in these fascinating pages. The last name brings us into contact with Scott.

"After breakfast," says Dorothy (Melrose, 19th September), "we went out, intending to go to the abbey, and in the street met with Mr. Scott, who gave us a cordial greeting, and conducted us thither himself. There he was on his own ground, for he is familiar with all that is known of the authentic history of Melrose and the popular tales connected with it. He pointed out many pieces of beautiful sculpture in obscure corners which would have escaped our notice. . . . Dined with Mr. S. at the inn. He was now travelling to the assizes at Jedburgh in his character of Sheriff of Selkirk; and for that cause, as well as for his own sake, he was treated with profound respect, a small part of which was vouchsafed to us as his friends, though I could not persuade the woman to show me the beds or make any promise till she was assured from the sheriff himself that he had no objection to sleep in the same room with William."

Next day they went in a pouring rain to Jedburgh, where Dorothy gives a good description of their bright, active hostess (afterwards the subject of a poem by her brother), and adds: "Mr. Scott sat with us an hour or two, and repeated a part of the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*. . . ." Even at this early stage we find Scott almost indifferent to his professional earnings, and observing carelessly to Wordsworth that "he was sure

he could, if he chose, get more money than he should ever wish to have from the booksellers." Of the *Lay* Wordsworth says: "The novelty of the manners, the clear picturesque descriptions, and the easy glowing energy of much of the verse greatly delighted me" (Lockhart, ch. xii.) After a visit to Hawick in his company she adds: "We wished we could have gone with Mr. S. into some of the remote dales of this country, where in almost every house he can find a home. . . . We parted from him with great regret."

One thinks of Guy Mannering and Dandie Dinmont, still dormant in their author's brain, and wishes one could have been by to see the young Scotch lawyer and some of his Liddesdale clients with the whole clan of terriers at their heels. A very intelligent dog of the "Pepper" family was, it may be mentioned here, a great favourite at Rydal in the poet's later years.

About 1805 this visit was returned by Mr. and Mrs. Scott. "I have often," says Lockhart, "heard Scott speak with enthusiastic delight of the reception he met with in the humble cottage which his brother-poet then inhabited on the banks of Grasmere." It was then that Scott's lines—

I climbed the dark brow of the mighty Helvellyn,  
and Wordsworth's "Fidelity"—

A barking sound the shepherd hears,  
were written *à propos* of the sad incident of a

young tourist's death and the fidelity of his dog. On this ascent the poets were accompanied by Sir Humphry Davy, and Wordsworth told Lockhart "that it would be difficult to express the feelings with which he, who so often had climbed Helvellyn alone, found himself standing on its summit with two such men as Scott and Davy" (Lockhart, ch. xiv.)

Soon after his return to Westmoreland (where, as Dorothy says, "We found Mary in perfect health, Joanna Hutchinson with her, and little John, the eldest child, born 18th June 1803, asleep in the clothes-basket by the fire") Wordsworth writes a cordial and affectionate letter to Scott, describing the beautiful autumnal scenery of the Lakes: "My sister was quite enchanted, and we often said to each other, 'What a pity Mr. Scott is not with us!' I had the pleasure of seeing Coleridge and Southey at Keswick last Sunday. Southey, whom I never saw much of before, I liked much. . . . My sister and I often talk of the happy days we spent in your company. Such things do not occur often in life. If we live we shall meet again; that is my consolation when I think of these things. . . . Farewell, God prosper you and all that belongs to you! Your sincere friend, for such I will call myself, though slow to use a word of such solemn meaning to any one,

"W. WORDSWORTH."



Throughout life Scott's appreciation of Wordsworth was generous and sincere. Few lines were more often quoted by him than those on Yarrow and the sonnet on Nidpath Castle. In his preface to the *Antiquary* he says he has placed some of the scenes among the lower orders, "because I agree with my friend Wordsworth that they seldom fail to express (their feelings) in the strongest and most powerful language."<sup>1</sup> He makes Jonathan Oldbuck quote the pathetic lines, "My eyes are dim with childish tears," etc., and in *Rob Roy* (not to multiply instances) ch. xxxviii. is headed with a verse from "Simon Lee."

Are we, on the other hand, to accuse Wordsworth of jealousy of Scott's brilliant and rapidly-growing fame because he was somewhat chary of his praise? As well accuse Molière's Alceste of being really a misanthrope because he did not join in bandying compliments with the two poets of the *salon*.

He could not have been constant to his own principles had he done otherwise. "As a poet,"

<sup>1</sup> In a letter to Southey, 1807, Scott says: "Wordsworth is harshly treated in the *Edinburgh Review*, but Jeffrey gives the sonnets as much praise as he usually does to anybody. I made him admire the song of Lord Clifford's minstrel, which I like exceedingly myself. But many of Wordsworth's lesser poems are *caviare*, not only to the multitude, but to all who judge of poetry by the established rules of criticism. Some of them, I can safely say, I like the better for these aberrations; in others they get beyond me: at any rate they ought to have been more cautiously hazarded" (Lockhart, ch. xvi.)

he said in later years, "Scott cannot live. I don't like to say all this, or to take to pieces some of the best-reputed passages of Scott's verse, especially in presence of my wife, because she thinks me too fastidious; but as a poet Scott *cannot* live, for he has never in verse written anything addressed to the immortal part of man. In making amusing stories in verse he will be superseded by some newer versifier; what he writes in the way of natural description is merely rhyming nonsense." "As a prose writer Wordsworth admitted that Scott had touched a higher vein, because there he had really dealt with feeling and passion. As historical novels professing to give the manners of a past time he did not attach much value to those works of Scott's so-called, because that he held was an attempt in which success was impossible."<sup>1</sup>

On the appearance of *Marmion* he wrote: "Thank you for *Marmion*. I think your end has been attained. That it is not the end which I should wish you to propose to yourself you will be well aware from what you know of my notions of composition both as to matter and manner."

Speaking at a later date (about 1832) of Scott's and still more of Byron's poems, he says: "My taste was formed, for I was forty-five when they appeared; and we cannot after that age love new things. New impressions are difficult to make.

<sup>1</sup> Bishop of Lincoln's *Memoirs*, ii. 445.

Had I been young, I could have enjoyed most of them, I have no doubt.”<sup>1</sup>

Time is even now justifying Wordsworth's criticism. Already the poems of Walter Scott are—except perhaps by tourists and elderly people—practically unread. His historical novels rarely penetrate beyond the schoolroom, and even then are seldom taken down in comparison with newer favourites; while those in which he paints the manners of the Scotch lairds and peasantry, and gives us such creations as Jeanie and David Deans, Caleb Balderstone, Mause Headrigg, and Meg Merrilies, have an element of immortality in them which ought to keep them fresh almost as long as Hamlet or Falstaff.

Speaking of Scott naturally suggests Burns, for whom Wordsworth had a warm admiration, tinged with regret at the weaknesses of so gifted a being. His sister's journal records how during their tour in Scotland they visited his grave—repeating to each other his own pathetic lines—

Is there a man, whose judgment clear, etc.

and his house. “There is no thought surviving in connection with Burns's daily life that is not heart-depressing.” A view of Skiddaw and his companions close to the home of Burns makes the brother and sister think, “that we might have been personally known to each other, and he have

<sup>1</sup> Knight, xi. 260.

looked upon those objects with more pleasure for our sakes. We talked of Coleridge's children and family, then at the foot of Skiddaw," and the thought of the dangers which the poet's surviving children were exposed to suggested the lines "To the Sons of Burns."

Wordsworth's defence<sup>1</sup> of "Tam o' Shanter" is singular as coming from a man of such a peculiarly sober temperament, but shows all the more the fairness and discrimination of his critical faculty.

Meanwhile the *Lyrical Ballads* had grown to two volumes, the second of which included, besides the Goslar poetry, some poems striking in themselves and important as characteristic of the Grasmere life. "The Old Cumberland Beggar," "Poems on the Naming of Places," "Ruth," and above all "Michael." The editions of 1802 and 1805 bore the not very hopeful motto, *Quam nihil ad genium, Papiniane, tuum!*

"Some think there is not a Wordsworth of good poetry in the great *L. B.* I daren't put the dreaded syllables at their just length, for my *back* tingles from the northern castigation,"

<sup>1</sup> "I pity him who cannot perceive that in all this, though there was no moral purpose, there is a moral effect—

'Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious,  
O'er all the ills of life victorious.'

What a lesson do these words convey of charitable indulgence for the vicious habits of the principal actor in the scene, and of those who resemble him! Men who to the rigidly virtuous are objects almost of loathing, and whom therefore they cannot serve," etc.

wrote Lamb to Manning in 1800. And Christopher Wordsworth wrote as follows :—

“CAMBRIDGE, 16th February 1801(?).

“I have lately received a second volume of the *Lyrical Ballads*. You must send for it. There is a new edition of the first volume with a new preface, but in other respects it has not any very important additions, except indeed a new poem by Coleridge. The whole of the second volume is *very* valuable ; several of the poems are exquisitely beautiful. They are of a much humaner and gentler cast than the first volume, and consequently much better calculated for general favour. Indeed the second volume ought to be read before the first. I have no doubt of their being exceedingly popular. Nor do I think that I am mistaken in saying that they mark out my brother as decidedly the first of living English poets.”

“CAMBRIDGE, 16th April 1801.

“Have you read the *Lyrical Ballads*? I shall be glad to hear that you have read them with pleasure. ‘Michael,’ ‘The Brothers,’ ‘Ruth,’ ‘The Cumberland Beggar,’ ‘Joanna,’ etc., all seem to me exquisitely beautiful, and of very great moral value. ‘There was a boy,’ ‘Nutting,’ ‘The Childless Father,’ and the poems about ‘Matthew,’ I also like exceedingly.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> MS. letters from Christopher Wordsworth to Rev. Jonathan Walton.

And there was one great man who vouchsafed a few words of encouragement to the struggling poet—a man who had so many of the elements of true greatness in his strangely compounded character that it makes one regret all the more that so much miry clay was mingled with the iron—the Hon. Charles James Fox. Wordsworth wrote him a letter expressive of more diffidence than he often allowed to appear, in which he very strikingly says: “Necessitated as you have been from your public situation to have much to do with men in bodies and in classes, . . . it has been your praise that you have not thereby been prevented from looking upon them as individuals, and that you have habitually left your heart open to be influenced by them in that capacity. This habit cannot but have made you dear to poets; and I am sure that if, since your first entrance into public life, there has been a single true poet living in England he must have loved you.”

Fox's reply was very gratifying.

“The poems,” he says, “have given me the greatest pleasure; and if I were obliged to choose out of them, I do not know whether I should not say that ‘Harry Gill,’ ‘We are Seven,’ ‘The Mad Mother,’ ‘Her Eyes are Wild,’ and ‘The Idiot,’ are my favourites. I read with particular attention the two you pointed out [‘The Brothers’ and ‘Michael’], but whether it be from early

prepossessions, or whatever other cause, I am no friend to blank verse for subjects which are to be treated of with simplicity." These poems had been specially mentioned as drawing attention to the class of "statesmen"—a class even then "rapidly disappearing."

Greenhead Ghyll, mentioned in the poem of "Michael," is within an easy walk of Grasmere, the scene of "The Brothers" is laid in Ennerdale, the various sites mentioned in the poems on the "Naming of Places" are mostly within an easy ramble from the poet's door. To one of these, "Brother's Grove," a tragic interest was hereafter to be attached. Captain John Wordsworth had spent a part of the year 1800 with his brother and sister at Grasmere, and the intercourse had been delightful to all three as showing that years of long separation had not impaired but rather strengthened the intellectual and spiritual no less than the natural bond between them. After he had gone (he left them on Michaelmas Day 1800, parting from his brother near Grisedale Tarn, where Ullswater first comes in view) William discovered the track of his footsteps in a sheltering fir grove above the cottage, and loved to tread the path—

For aught I know,  
Timing my steps to thine ; and with a store  
Of inextinguishable sympathies  
Mingling most earnest wishes for the day,

When we, and others whom we love, shall meet,  
A second time, in Grasmere's happy vale.<sup>1</sup>

The sailor's judgment on his brother's work was as true as it was simply expressed. "Most of William's poetry *improves upon the second, third, or fourth reading*. Now people in general are not sufficiently interested to try a second reading.

"My brother's poetry has a great deal to struggle against ; but I hope it will overcome all ; it is certainly *founded upon Nature, and that is the best foundation*."

So much for the views of the East India captain, who was just about to sail for China on board the *Abergavenny*, a ship "that no one could tell from a 74 gun ship"—and hoping to make a fortune to be shared with his brother and sister. He was unmarried, and they and theirs were the objects nearest to his heart.

Meanwhile public affairs grew daily more threatening. The Peace of Amiens was on the point of disruption. In the year 1802-3 the feeble Addington Ministry, pelted with epigrams by Canning, and thoroughly unequal to the difficult task imposed upon it,<sup>2</sup> was unsuccessfully negotiating with the First Consul of France, especially on the subject of Malta. The declaration of war

<sup>1</sup> Poems on "Naming of Places."

<sup>2</sup> *Si ce ministère dure, la Grande Bretagne ne durera pas*, said the Russian ambassador, Count Woronzow.



18th May 1803, Buonaparte's unjustifiable seizure of some thousands of unoffending English subjects, and the critical state of affairs generally, brought Pitt from his retirement at Walmer to the House of Commons to deliver a speech in favour of war, of which his great rival Fox said: "It is a speech, which, if Demosthenes had been present, he must have admired, and might have envied."

Pitt with his usual loftiness of character abstained from courting a vote of censure on the Government, and busied himself, as Warden of the Cinque Ports, in promoting the great volunteer movement.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile Napoleon had occupied Hanover, and had a hundred thousand men encamped at Boulogne ready for the invasion of England, and medals actually prepared with the inscription, *Frappe à Londres*. (Three of these are still extant.) Ireland was unquiet, and the situation—a critical one in itself—was rendered more so by the mental condition of the King, who not long afterwards had another seizure of his distressing malady.

The whole country was aglow with those fires of patriotism which, latent in more peaceful times, are never really extinct in the hearts of Englishmen. Wordsworth was deeply moved, as is shown

<sup>1</sup> The national feeling is well illustrated in the chapter of Scott's *Antiquary*, when the "invasion panic" lights upon the town of Fairport.

by the group of sonnets bearing this date, and following those already mentioned among the "Sonnets Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty." Of these sonnets it might be said, as he said of Milton—

In his hand

The thing became a trumpet, whence he blew  
Soul-animating strains, alas, too few !

Such sonnets as xvi.—

It is not to be thought of that the flood  
Of British freedom, which, to the open sea  
Of the world's praise, from dark antiquity  
Hath flow'd "with pomp of waters unwithstood"—  
Road by which all might come and go that would,  
And bear out freights of worth to foreign lands ;  
That this most famous stream in bogs and sands  
Should perish, and to evil and to good  
Be lost for ever. In our halls is hung  
Armour of the invincible knights of old :  
We must be free or die, who speak the tongue  
That Shakspeare spake—the faith and morals hold  
Which Milton held. In everything we are sprung  
Of earth's best blood, have titles manifold.

And xxii.—

OCTOBER 1803

When, looking on the present face of things,  
I see one man, of men the meanest too !  
Raised up to sway the world, to do, undo,  
With mighty nations for his underlings,  
The great events with which old story rings  
Seem vain and hollow : I find nothing great ;  
Nothing is left which I can venerate ;

So that almost a doubt within me springs  
Of Providence, such emptiness at length  
Seems at the heart of all things. But, great God !  
I measure back the steps which I have trod,  
And tremble, seeing as I do, the strength  
Of such poor instruments : With thoughts sublime  
I tremble at the sorrow of the time.

and xxiii.—

TO THE MEN OF KENT, OCTOBER 1803

Vanguard of liberty, ye men of Kent !  
Ye children of a soil that doth advance  
Its haughty brow against the coast of France,  
Now is the time to prove your hardiment !  
To France be words of invitation sent !  
They from their fields can see the countenance  
Of your fierce war, may ken the glittering lance  
And hear you shouting forth your brave intent.  
Left single, in bold parley, ye, of yore,  
Did from the Norman win a gallant wreath :  
Confirm'd the charters that were yours before.  
No parleying now ! In Britain is one breath ;  
We all are with you now from shore to shore :  
Ye men of Kent, 'tis victory or death !

are exceptionally fine ; but there is not a weak or poor sonnet in the whole group. The feeling is at a white heat all through, yet all is dignified, manly, and occasionally full of tenderness. He says to England :—

For dearly must we prize thee ; we who find  
In thee a bulwark for the cause of men :  
And I by my affection was beguiled :

What wonder if a Poet now and then,  
Among the many movements of his mind,  
Felt for thee as a lover-or a child ?

Though not strictly in chronological order, we may mention here his tribute to Charles Fox (who died 13th September 1806) in the lines "Loud is the Vale," and his character of Pitt in a private letter<sup>1</sup> written a few months earlier (Feb. 1806). "Mr. Pitt is also gone" (he had just spoken of the death of Nelson); "by tens of thousands looked upon in like manner as a great loss. For my own part, as probably you know, I have never been able to regard his political life with complacency. I believe him, however, to have been as disinterested a man and as true a lover of his country as it was possible for so ambitious a man to be. His *first* wish, though probably unknown to himself, was that his country should prosper *under his administration*; his *next*, that it should *prosper*. Could the *order* of these wishes have been *reversed* Mr. Pitt would have avoided many of the grievous mistakes into which, I think, he fell. I know, my dear Sir George, you will give me credit for speaking without arrogance; and I am aware it is not unlikely you may differ greatly from me on these points. But I like in some things to differ with a friend, and that he should *know* I differ from him; it seems to make a more

<sup>1</sup> To Sir George Beaumont. *Memoirs*, i. 322.

healthy friendship, to act as a relief to those notions and feelings which we have in common, and to give them a grace and spirit which they could not otherwise possess." Of Sir George Beaumont more will be said hereafter ; it is now time to chronicle the first great sorrow of Wordsworth's manhood.

## CHAPTER V

### SORROW AND FRIENDSHIP—1805-1808

As has already been said, Captain Wordsworth left his family at Grasmere in the spring of 1801 in the *Abergavenny* East Indiaman. He made another voyage in her in 1803, and from this also he returned. The brothers met for a short time in London, when he again sailed in command of the *Abergavenny* in February 1805, bound for India and China, with £70,000 on board in specie and a cargo worth £200,000. There were 402 persons on board. No prospects could be brighter—few have been more suddenly and completely blasted. Owing to the incompetency of a pilot the ship struck on the shambles of the Bill of Portland, and the captain and a large portion of the crew perished (5th February 1805). Nothing can be more pathetic than the poet's letters on this occasion. In one dated 11th February he says (to Sir George Beaumont): "I shall do all in my power to sustain my sister

under her sorrow, which is, and long will be, bitter and poignant. We did not love him as a brother only, but as a man of original mind, and an honour to all about him. Oh! dear friend, forgive me for talking thus. We have had no tidings of Coleridge. I tremble for the moment when he is to hear of my brother's death; it will distress him to the heart, and his poor body cannot bear sorrow. He loved my brother, and he knows how we at Grasmere loved him." Again: "When he came home" (after an unsuccessful voyage) "we chanced to be in London, and saw him. 'Oh,' said he, 'I have thought of you, and nothing but you; if ever of myself and my bad success, it was only on your account.' . . . Lastly came the lamentable voyage which he entered upon, full of expectation and love to his sister and myself and my wife, whom indeed he loved with all a brother's tenderness. This is the end of his part of the agreement, of his efforts for my welfare! God grant me life and strength to fulfil mine! I shall never lose sight of him: there is a bond between us yet, the same as if he were living, nay, far more sacred, calling upon me to do my utmost, as he *to the last* did his utmost to live in honour and worthiness. Some of the newspapers carelessly asserted that he did not wish to survive his ship. This is false. He was heard by one of the surviving officers giving

orders, with all possible calmness, a very little before the ship went down ; and when he could remain at his post no longer, then, and not till then, he attempted to save himself. I knew this would be so, but it was satisfactory for me to have it confirmed by external evidence. Do not think our grief unreasonable. Of all human beings whom I ever knew, he was the man of the most rational desires, the most sedate habits, and the most perfect self-command. He was modest and gentle, and shy even to disease, but this was wearing off. In everything his judgment was sound and original, . . . and his eye for the beauties of nature was as fine and delicate as ever poet or painter was gifted with. . . . He walked all his life pure among many impure. Except a little hastiness of temper when anything was done in a clumsy or bungling manner, or when improperly contradicted upon occasions of not much importance, he had not one vice of his profession. I never heard an oath or even an indelicate expression or allusion from him in my life ; his modesty was equal to that of the purest woman. In prudence, in meekness, in self-denial, in fortitude, in just desires and elegant and refined enjoyments, with an entire simplicity of manners, life, and habit, he was all that could be wished for in man ; strong in health, and of a noble person, with every hope about him that



could render life dear, thinking of and living only for others,—and we see what has been his end! So good must be better; so high must be destined to be higher.”

To Southey he writes the day after the arrival of the sad tidings (12th February 1805):—

“If you could bear to come to this house of mourning to-morrow I should be for ever thankful. We weep much to-day, and that relieves us. As to fortitude, I hope I shall show that, and that all of us will show it in a proper time by keeping down many a silent pang hereafter. . . . I condole with you from my soul on the melancholy account of your own brother’s situation; God grant you may not hear such tidings! Oh! it makes the heart groan, that with such a beautiful world as this to live in, and such a soul as that of man’s is by nature and gift of God, that we should go about on such errands as we do, destroying and laying waste; and ninety-nine in a hundred of us never easy in any road that travels towards peace and quietness. And yet what virtue and what goodness, what heroism and courage, what triumphs of disinterested love everywhere, and human life, after all, what it is. Surely this is not to be for ever, even on this perishable planet. Come to us to-morrow if you can; your conversation I know will do me good.”

The striking character of his brother given in

the last extract but one seems already like the germ of the noble poem "The Happy Warrior" (written in 1806), one of the best, and deservedly best-known, of Wordsworth's poems. Here the ethical element in his nature is seen, as in the "Ode to Duty," written<sup>1</sup> in 1805, in perfect union with the manliest and in its way the loftiest poetry. These two poems may be said to be the very flower of the great patriotic seed-time whence they sprang, nurtured on the soil of a heart as strong as it was loving, and watered by the tears of a deep personal grief. Some features in the Happy Warrior's character were borrowed from that of Lord Nelson—who died 21st October 1805, uttering with almost his latest breath, "Thank God, I have done my duty,"—but the poet himself owned that many touches in the picture, if not its leading idea, were borrowed from the beloved brother so lately lost. The character of the Happy Warrior, heaven be thanked, has renewed itself again and again in many generations of noble Englishmen, in our Wellesleys, our Lawrences, and our Gordons. The last name is fresh in memory, and many of us will remember how at the news of his death the lines from "The Happy Warrior" were most justly and discerningly applied to him.

<sup>1</sup> "On the model," as the author says, "of Gray's 'Ode to Adversity,' which is copied from Horace's 'Ode to Fortune.'"

More affecting still are the other poems in memory of John Wordsworth. The lines on "The Daisy" are singularly touching; it seems as if the commonest and simplest object called up his memory to his brother's mind. How characteristic that is of deep grief!

The elegiac verses,<sup>1</sup> with the simple tearful pathos of the stanza ending—

Sea—Ship—drowned—Shipwreck—so it<sup>2</sup> came,  
The meek, the brave, the good was gone;  
He who had been our living John  
Was nothing but a name—

and concluded in a somewhat abrupt and unfinished way, as if the writer's feelings were unequal to working up the poem to a state of higher completeness; and lastly the stanzas suggested by a picture (by Sir George Beaumont) of Peele Castle in a Storm, which, contrasted with the calm sunshine in which the poet had habitually seen it for "four summer weeks," seemed like a parable of the change which grief was to bring into his life, —are all different illustrations of his sorrowing mood.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Composed at the place where they had parted in Grisedale Pass, and beginning—

"The sheep-boy whistled loud," etc.

<sup>2</sup> The message.

<sup>8</sup> These stanzas contain the lines sometimes *misquoted*—

"The light that never was on sea or land,  
The consecration, and the poet's dream;"

Here, however, we may turn to the brighter side. For the friendship of Sir George Beaumont already mentioned *was* one of the brightest spots in Wordsworth's life. He was one of the first men of rank or social standing who had appreciated him. As a descendant of the Elizabethan dramatist he had a hereditary sensibility to poetry. As the head of an old family he possessed the fine breeding, influence, and courtesy of an English gentleman. As a lover of art, and indeed a painter himself, he had been, to his honour, one of Wilkie's earliest and kindest patrons. His friendship with Wordsworth began in the year 1803—Coleridge being the bond of union between them. Beaumont generously purchased<sup>1</sup> a plot of ground at Applethwaite near Keswick, and presented it to Wordsworth, whom at that time he had not seen, in hopes that the two poets might become neighbours. Unhappily Coleridge was soon afterwards sent abroad for his health, and the plan was never carried into effect.<sup>2</sup> Wordsworth was eight weeks and almost equally fine

"A power is gone which nothing can restore;  
A deep distress hath humanised my soul."

We may observe that Gray's "Elegy" must have been as fresh in Wordsworth's mind as his "Ode to Adversity" at this time.

<sup>1</sup> A similar act of kindness may be recorded on the part of Earl Lonsdale, who paid £800 into Wordsworth's account (through Mr. Thomas Wilkinson, the Quaker poet, whose "Spade" William Wordsworth apostrophised in verse) to enable him to buy a property near Ullswater. Of this generous gift £200 was gratefully accepted.

<sup>2</sup> At another time Sir George purchased the lovely spot "Lough-

before he could summon up his faculties to thank his benefactor; writing hurt his chest; he was away from home, and had not his appliances about him; he did not like doing badly and against the grain what he felt "ought to be an act of pure pleasure and enjoyment." However, at length the letter got written, and it is one that does credit both to the giver and the receiver of the benefit. He ends with an allusion to the volunteer movement already mentioned. "At Grasmere we have turned out almost to a man; we are to go to Ambleside on Sunday to be mustered, and put on for the first time our military apparel." How one would like to have seen him being drilled; it may be doubted whether he felt altogether a Happy Warrior at such a moment! But probably, as in the case of Gibbon, the actual contact with the externals of warfare, on however humble a scale, helped him to realise certain aspects of manly life in a way he could not otherwise have done.

Sir George Beaumont was laying out his grounds at Coleorton, near Ashby de la Zouch, Leicestershire, the forest of Charnwood, and the ruins of Grace Dieu, and called Wordsworth to his aid. It was an occupation thoroughly to the poet's "rigg Tarn," in hopes of building a house there. This plan was relinquished; he sold it again, and gave the money to Wordsworth, who characteristically spent it in planting yew trees in Grasmere churchyard, and surrounding them with strong oaken fences.

taste. He possessed, in landscape gardening as in poetry, not only an enthusiasm for beauty, but a large share of that critical faculty which enabled him to know on what the beauty depended. It is rare to find a poet whose genius had so much of spontaneity about it, "whose heart was hot within him, and while he was thus musing the fire kindled, and at the last he spake with his tongue," so thoroughly able in cooler moments to analyse the laws by which certain effects were produced. It reminds one of the great actress Rachel, who knew precisely the way the folds of her robe were falling at moments when her acting was apparently most impassioned and most self-forgetful.

Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes*, published in 1810, a few years later than the time of which we are speaking, is a remarkable illustration of his delicacy of eye (which many a painter might have envied) for all the details which help to make up a natural picture, for the light and shade which lend variety and an almost dramatic interest to mountain scenery, as well as a comprehensive and imaginative grasp of the grander and more permanent features of the Lake District.

These gifts he placed at the service of his new friend, spending the winter of 1806-7 with all his family at a house at Coleorton. A daughter had been born 16th August 1804, and was Lady

Beaumont's goddaughter, and was called Dorothy (Dora). "The name of Dorothy," he says to Sir George, "obsolete as it is now grown, had been so long devoted in my own thoughts to the first daughter that I might have, that I could not break this promise to myself, a promise in which my wife participated ; though the name of *Mary*, to my ear the most musical and truly English in sound we have, would have otherwise been most welcome to me, including as it would Lady Beaumont and its mother."<sup>1</sup>

It is much to be regretted that space will allow of few extracts from the Beaumont correspondence. The following, however, is an instructive warning to gentlemen who have parks to lay out. It refers to Mr. Price's seat at Foxley in Wales, of which Wordsworth says : "The domain is too extensive for the character of the country. . . . A man by little and little becomes so delicate and fastidious with respect to forms in scenery, where he has a power to control them, that if they do not exactly please him in all moods and every point of view, his power becomes his law ; he banishes one, and then rids himself of another, impoverishing and *monotonising* landscapes, which, if not originally distinguished by the bounty of nature, must be ill able to spare the inspiriting varieties which art, and the occupations and wants

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs*, i. 271.

of life in a country left to itself, cannot fail to produce. This relish of humanity Foxley wants, and is therefore to me, in spite of all these recommendations, a melancholy spot. . . . I heard the other day of two artists who thus expressed themselves upon the subject of a scene among our lakes: 'Plague upon those vile enclosures!' said one; 'they spoil everything.' 'Oh,' said the other, 'I never see them.' Glover was the name of this last. Now, for my own part, I should not wish to be either of these gentlemen, but to have in my own mind the power of turning to advantage, wherever it is possible, every object of art and nature as they appear before me. What a noble instance, as you have often pointed out to me, has Rubens given of this in that picture in your possession, where he has brought, as it were, a whole county into one landscape, and made the most formal partitions of cultivation, hedgerows of pollard willows, conduct the eye into the depths and distances of his picture; and thus, more than by any other means, has given it that appearance of immensity which is so striking." The same letter<sup>1</sup> contains the sonnet "Praised be the Art," suggested (in part) by a picture of Beaumont's hanging over the poet's chimney-piece (in the one sitting-room clear of smoke!), "which, having walked out to the side of Grasmere brook, where

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs*, i. 274, 275 (28th August 1811).



it murmurs through the meadows near the church,  
I composed immediately." -

UPON THE SIGHT OF A BEAUTIFUL PICTURE

Praised be the art whose subtle power could stay  
Yon cloud, and fix it in that glorious shape ;  
Nor would permit the thin smoke to escape,  
Nor those bright sunbeams to forsake the day ;  
Which stopp'd that band of travellers on their way  
Ere they were lost within the shady wood ;  
And show'd the bark upon the glassy flood  
For ever anchor'd in her sheltering bay.  
Soul-soothing art ! whom morning, noontide, even,  
Do serve with all their changeful pageantry !  
Thou, with ambition modest, yet sublime,  
Here, for the sight of mortal man, hast given  
To one brief moment, caught from fleeting time,  
The appropriate calm of blest eternity.

Meanwhile the sympathy of Sir George, and perhaps no less of Lady Beaumont, was deeply grateful to Wordsworth, then at the height, or depth, of his unpopularity. Three editions of the *Lyrical Ballads* had been issued between 1798 and 1807, when a fourth was called for—no very exciting sale, it is true, but sufficient to keep interest alive. But in consequence of the unjust and severe censures of literary critics no edition was needed between 1807-15. A striking letter of Wordsworth's to Lady Beaumont in 1807 (which may be found quoted at greater length in Mr. Myers's graceful and discriminating

biography,<sup>1</sup> and *in extenso* in the late Bishop of Lincoln's *Memoirs*, i. 331) has sometimes been looked upon as egotistical and self-laudatory. "It is an awful truth," he says, "that there neither is nor can be any genuine enjoyment of poetry among nineteen out of twenty of those persons who live, or wish to live, in the broad light of the world, among those who either are, or are striving to make themselves, people of consideration in society. This is a truth, and an awful one, because, to be incapable of a feeling of poetry, in my sense of the word, is to be without love of human nature and reverence for God. . . . My object is to make you, my dear friend, as easy-hearted as myself with respect to these poems. Trouble not yourself upon their present reception. Of what moment is that compared with what I trust is their destiny? To console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight, by making the happy happier; to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think, and feel, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous;—this is their office, which I trust they will perform long after we (that is, all that is mortal of us) are mouldered in our graves. . . . These [fashionable] people, in the senseless hurry of their idle lives, do not *read* books, they merely snatch a glance at them, that

<sup>1</sup> *English Men of Letters.*

they may talk about them. And even if this were not so, never forget what, I believe, was observed to you by Coleridge, that every great and original writer, in proportion as he is great or original, must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished; he must teach the art by which he is to be seen; this, in a certain degree, even to all persons, however wise and pure may be their lives, and however unvitiated their taste."

Surely they who detect egotism in language of this kind can never have known what it is to feel the responsibility of any talent, much less of genius of so high an order that it approximates in the imperiousness of its dictates to the "burden" laid on some prophet or apostle, *vae mihi si non evangelizavero*. Who would call such men as Isaiah or St. Paul egotists? And it surely is not too much to say that if ever a man in these days of higher civilisation felt, and ought to have felt, that he had received a call to which he *could* not turn a deaf ear, a mandate which he must obey through poverty, unpopularity, neglect, and ridicule, and whose course has been justified by the verdict of posterity, that man was William Wordsworth.

Later in life he wrote (December 1839) to an American friend, Professor Reed, *à propos* of "the estimation my poems are held or are likely to be held in, through the vast country to which you belong. I wish I could feel as lively as you do

upon this subject, or even upon the general destiny of those works. . . . I am standing on the brink of that vast ocean I must sail so soon, I must speedily lose sight of the shore, and I could not once have conceived how little I now am troubled with the thought of how long or short a time they who remain on that shore may have a sight of me." He adds his own ejaculation over the grave of Burns—

The best of what we do and are,  
Just God, forgive !

Readers of this extract will not love it the less for its possibly suggesting to their minds Lord Tennyson's touching poem of "Crossing the Bar."

At the early time we now write of, Wordsworth's sympathisers, if few, were warm. "He crush the *Excursion*!" exclaimed Southey (now Wordsworth's neighbour at Keswick) in reference to Jeffrey's boast. "Tell him he might as well fancy he could crush Skiddaw."

Coleridge's fine character of him, in a letter to R. Sharp in 1804, may perhaps be inserted here.

"In spite of Wordsworth's occasional fits of hypochondriacal uncomfortableness, from which, more or less, and at longer or shorter intervals, he has never been wholly free from his very childhood, his is the happiest family I ever saw. Wordsworth both deserves to be, and is, a happy man; and a happy man not from natural tem-

perament, for therein lies his main obstacle ; not by enjoyment of the good things of this world, for even to this day, from the first dawn of his manhood, he has purchased independence, and leisure for greatly good pursuits, by austere frugality and daily self-denials ; nor yet by an accidental confluence of amiable and happy-making friends and relatives, for every one near to his heart has been placed there by choice, and after knowledge and deliberation ; but he is a happy man because he is a philosopher, because he knows the intrinsic value of the different objects of human pursuit, and regulates his wishes in strict subordination to that knowledge, because he feels that we can do but one thing well, and that therefore we must make a choice. And certainly no small part of his happiness is due to that unity of interest and that homogeneity of character. . . . He will hereafter be admitted as the first and greatest philosophical poet, the only man who has effected a complete and constant synthesis of thought and feeling, and combined them in poetic form with the music of pleasurable passion."

O great Bard !

Ere yet that last strain dying awed the air,  
With steadfast eye I viewed thee in the choir  
Of ever-enduring men.

So Coleridge had sung in his magnificent out-

burst of poetry after hearing the *Prelude* read by Wordsworth.

It is sad to have to chronicle even a passing misunderstanding between two such men, but a time came when Coleridge's unhappy custom of taking opium, originally as an alleviation of pain, and afterwards because the drug had become indispensable to him, gave rise to some well-meant remarks from Wordsworth to a mutual friend, through whose indiscretion a breach arose between the two poets, which caused the greatest pain and distress to them both. Wordsworth's lines, "A Complaint," beginning—

There is a change—and I am poor,  
not improbably refer to this epoch, and we may compare the well-known passage in Coleridge's "Christabel" beginning—

Alas, they had been friends in youth !

After about two years a reconciliation took place, and Wordsworth went to London to visit Coleridge. On his return (April 1808) he writes to Sir George Beaumont: "I heard Coleridge lecture twice, and he seemed to give great satisfaction, but he was not in spirits, and suffered much during the course of the week, both in body and mind. . . . C. and I saw Mr. Angerstein's pictures. The day was very unfavourable ; not a gleam of sun, and the clouds were quite in

disgrace. The great picture of Michael Angelo and Sebastian" (Raising of Lazarus, now in National Gallery) "pleased me more than ever. The new Rembrandt" (probably the Woman taken in Adultery) "has, I think, very much in it to admire, but still more to *wonder* at, rather than admire. I have seen many pictures of Rembrandt which I should prefer to it. The light in the *depth* of the Temple is far the finest part of it; indeed it is the only part of the picture which gives me very high pleasure; but that does highly please me. . . . You will deem it strange, but really some of the imagery of London has, since my return hither, been more present to my mind than that of this noble vale. I left Coleridge at seven o'clock on Sunday morning, and walked towards the City in a very thoughtful and melancholy state of mind. I had passed through Temple Bar and by St. Dunstan's, noticing nothing, and entirely occupied with my own thoughts, when, looking up, I saw before me the avenue of Fleet Street, silent, empty, and pure white, with a sprinkling of new-fallen snow, not a cart or carriage to obstruct the view, no noise, only a few soundless and dusky foot-passengers here and there. You remember the elegant line of the curve of Ludgate Hill in which this avenue would terminate, and beyond, and towering above it, was the huge and majestic form of St. Paul's, solemnised by a thin

veil of falling snow. I cannot say how much I was affected by this unthought-of sight in such a place, and what a blessing I felt there is in habits of exalted imagination. My sorrow was controlled, and my uneasiness of mind—not quieted and relieved altogether—seemed at once to receive the gift of an anchor of security” (Knight, x. 115, 116).

While on this subject, we may add that both Wordsworth and Southey exercised the kindest and most fatherly care for the children of Coleridge, Hartley especially; and the daughters of the three poets grew up to be dear friends.

The mention of Southey and Coleridge naturally suggests the name of Charles Lamb, whose intimacy with Wordsworth is one of the most pleasing instances of literary friendship; in a certain way it recalls that of Goldsmith for Johnson, but the advantage is distinctly on the side of the two former names. Wordsworth has been not unreasonably accused of want of humour; nevertheless there was a strong mutual attraction between him and the finest, freshest, tenderest, and raciest of English humourists.<sup>1</sup> Some of Lamb’s

<sup>1</sup> The late Bishop of Lincoln used to tell as an amusing illustration of William Wordsworth’s lack of humour the following lines, supposed to be a reply to Pope’s—

“I am his Highness’s dog at Kew;  
Pray tell me, sir, whose dog are you?”  
“I am no dog; yet let me tell you,  
You are a very saucy fellow!”



most delightful letters are to Wordsworth and his sister. To the former he writes some years after our present date: "From my den I return you condolence for your decaying sight; not for anything there is to see in the country, but for the miss of the pleasure of reading a London newspaper. The poets are well to listen to; anything high may, nay, must, be read out—you read it to yourself with an imaginary auditor; but the light paragraphs must be glid over by the proper eye; mouthing mumbles their gossamery substance. 'Tis these trifles I should mourn in fading sight. A newspaper is the single gleam of comfort I receive here;<sup>1</sup> it comes from rich Cathay with tidings of mankind. Yet I could not attend to it read out by the most beloved voice. But your eyes do not get worse, I gather. O for the collyrium of Tobias enclosed in a whiting's liver, to send you with no apocryphal good wishes! The last time I heard from you, you had knocked your head against something. Do not do so; for your head (I do not flatter) is not a nob, or the top of a brass nail, or the end of a nine-pin—unless a Vulcanian hammer could fairly batter a 'Recluse' out of it; then would I bid the smirched god knock, and knock lustily, the two-handed skinker. Mary must squeeze out a line *propria manu*," etc.

<sup>1</sup> At Enfield (1830).

## CHAPTER VI

"THE EXCURSION," "CONVENTION OF CINTRA,"  
"WHITE DOE," ETC.—1808-1814

A FEW words must now be devoted to the *Excursion*, the most important, in a sense, of Wordsworth's works published during his lifetime; for the "Recluse" was never completed, and the *Prelude* not published till after his death. His most popular work it certainly was not; few people have courage to attack a quasi-epic poem; and his warmest admirers must own that the Homer of Lakeland nods sometimes. The scheme of the poem is simple enough: the poet or chief speaker falls in at the ruined cottage with the Wanderer—an aged Scotch pedlar whose prototype or, rather, prototypes seem to have existed in real life, whose philosophic gifts are of a singularly high order, and who tells with much pathos and vivid realistic detail the story of poor broken-hearted and deserted Margaret.

The scene of the second book is laid among the

Langdales, and introduces us to the Solitary, a melancholy student soured by disappointment and atheistical opinions. Some of the finest poetry in the whole work occurs in this book—*e.g.* the mountain funeral—

On these and other kindred thoughts intent,  
In silence by my comrade's side I lay,  
He also silent ; when, from out the heart  
Of that profound abyss, a solemn voice,  
Or several voices in one solemn sound,  
Was heard ascending ; mournful, deep, and slow  
The cadence, as of psalms—a funeral dirge !  
We listen'd, looking down towards the hut,  
But seeing no one ; meanwhile from below  
The strain continued, spiritual as before ;  
And now distinctly could I recognise  
These words :—*Shall in the grave thy love be known,  
In death thy faithfulness ?*—"God rest his soul !"   
The Wand'rer cried, abruptly breaking silence ;  
"He is departed, and finds peace at last !"

This scarcely spoken, and those holy strains  
Not ceasing, forth appear'd in view a band  
Of rustic persons from behind the hut,  
Bearing a coffin in the midst, with which  
They shaped their course along the sloping side  
Of that small valley, singing as they moved ;  
A sober company and few, the men  
Bareheaded, and all decently attired.  
Some steps when they had thus advanced, the dirge  
Ended ; and, from the stillness that ensued  
Recovering, to my friend I said, . . . .

The passage about the Langdale Pikes—

In genial mood,  
While at our pastoral banquet thus we sate  
Fronting the window of that little cell,  
I could not ever and anon forbear  
To glance an upward look on two huge peaks,  
That from some other vale peer'd into this.  
"Those lusty twins, on which your eyes are cast,"  
Exclaim'd our host, "if here you dwell, would be  
Your prized companions. Many are the notes  
Which, in his tuneful course, the wind draws forth  
From rocks, woods, caverns, heaths, and dashing shores ;  
And well those lofty brethren bear their part  
In the wild concert—chiefly when the storm  
Rides high ; then all the upper air they fill  
With roaring sound, that ceases not to flow  
Like smoke along the level of the blast,  
In mighty current : theirs, too, is the song  
Of stream and headlong flood that seldom fails ;  
And, in the grim and breathless hour of noon,  
Methinks that I have heard them echo back  
The thunder's greeting : nor have Nature's laws  
Left them ungifted with a power to yield  
Music of finer tone ; a harmony,  
So do I call it, though it be the hand  
Of silence,—though there be no voice ; the clouds,  
The mist, the shadows, light of golden suns,  
Motions of moonlight, all come thither—touch,  
And have an answer—thither come, and shape  
A language not unwelcome to sick hearts  
And idle spirits : there the sun himself,  
At the calm close of summer's longest day,  
Rests his substantial orb ; between those heights,  
And on the top of either pinnacle,  
More keenly than elsewhere in night's blue vault,  
Sparkle the stars, as of their station proud.

Thoughts are not busier in the mind of man  
Than the mute agents stirring there :—alone  
Here do I sit and watch."

And a grand sky-spectacle at the end—

So with their freight the shepherds homeward moved  
Through the dull mist, I following—when a step,  
A single step, that freed me from the skirts  
Of the blind vapour, open'd to my view  
Glory beyond all glory ever seen  
By waking sense or by the dreaming soul !  
Though I am conscious that no power of words  
Can body forth, no hues of speech can paint  
That gorgeous spectacle—too bright and fair  
Even for remembrance ; yet the attempt may give  
Collateral interest to this homely tale.  
The appearance, instantaneously disclosed,  
Was of a mighty city—boldly say  
A wilderness of building—sinking far  
And self-withdrawn into a boundless depth,  
Far sinking into splendour—without end !  
Fabric it seemed of diamond and of gold,  
With alabaster domes and silver spires :  
And blazing terrace upon terrace, high  
Uplifted ; here, serene pavilions bright,  
In avenues disposed ; there, towers begirt  
With battlements, that on their restless fronts  
Bore stars—illumination of all gems ! ,  
By earthly nature had the effect been wrought  
Upon the dark materials of the storm  
Now pacified ; on them, and on the coves  
And mountain steeps and summits, whereunto  
The vapours had receded, taking there  
Their station under a cerulean sky !  
Oh, 'twas an unimaginable sight !

Clouds, mists, streams, watery rocks, and emerald turf,  
 Clouds of all tincture, rocks and sapphire sky,  
 Confused, commingled, mutually inflamed,  
 Molten together, and composing thus,  
 Each lost in each, that marvellous array  
 Of temple, palace, citadel, and huge  
 Fantastic pomp of structure without name,  
 In fleecy folds voluminous enwrapp'd.  
 Right in the midst, where interspace appear'd  
 Of open court, an object like a throne  
 Under a shining canopy of state  
 Stood fix'd ; and fix'd resemblances were seen  
 To implements of ordinary use,  
 But vast in size, in substance glorified ;  
 Such as by Hebrew prophets were beheld  
 In vision—forms uncouth of mightiest power,  
 For admiration and mysterious awe.  
 Below me was the earth ; this little vale,  
 Lay low beneath my feet ; 'twas visible—  
 I saw not, but I felt, that it was there.  
 That which I *saw* was the reveal'd abode  
 Of spirits in beatitude : my heart  
 Swell'd in my breast. "I have been dead," I cried,  
 "And now I live ! Oh ! wherefore do I live ?"  
 And with that pang I pray'd to be no more !

The third book continues the history and character of the Solitary ; the fourth, entitled "Despondency Corrected," is interesting as showing how Wordsworth's own mind recovered its tone after the disappointments of the French Revolution, and is most helpful and suggestive, containing some passages which ought to be familiar to all both for solid thought and exquisite

poetry. The fifth introduces us to the Pastor, and contains the often-quoted description of Grasmere Church. "The Churchyard among the Mountains" follows next, and contains among other sketches from humble life the touching story of Ellen. The seventh book continues the subject, and introduces among other portraits that of the "wonderful" Robert Walker. The eighth book contrasts the ages of chivalry with those of mechanical invention and commerce. Speaking of the man who boasts of the latter, the poet says in a somewhat Sophoclean vein—

I cannot share  
His proud complacency :—yet do I exult,  
Casting reserve away, exult to see  
An intellectual mastery exercised  
O'er the blind elements ; a purpose given,  
A perseverance fed ; almost a soul  
Imparted—to brute matter. I rejoice,  
Measuring the force of those gigantic powers  
That, by the thinking mind, have been compelled  
To serve the will of feeble-bodied Man.  
For with the sense of admiration blends  
The animating hope that time may come  
When, strengthened, yet not dazzled, by the might  
Of this dominion over Nature gained,  
Men of all lands shall exercise the same  
In due proportion to their country's need ;  
Learning, though late, that all true glory rests,  
All praise, all safety, and all happiness,  
Upon the moral Law.

We may compare the striking sonnet<sup>1</sup> upon  
 "Steamboats, Viaducts, and Railways"—

Motions and means, on land and sea at war  
 With old poetic feeling—

where he looks forward

To the mind's gaining that prophetic sense  
 Of future change, that point of vision, whence  
 May be discovered what in soul ye are.  
 In spite of all that beauty may disown  
 In your harsh features, *Nature doth embrace*  
*Her lawful offspring in man's art*; and Time,  
 Pleased with your triumphs o'er his brother Space,  
 Accepts from your bold hands the proffered crown  
 Of hope, and smiles on you with cheer sublime.

Here surely we may observe a very remarkable instance of Wordsworth's wholesome, truthful good sense, of which an illustration was earlier given in his remarks about Mr. Price's grounds at Foxley. Railways *are* the offspring of Nature. Given the human brain, water, coals, and iron, they were bound to come in time; they are part of evolution, only the word had hardly come into fashion in his days. And these passages are worth dwelling on because they distinguish a strong, manly, clear-headed poet from maudlin sentimentalists—mere *laudatores temporis acti*. On the other hand, he cannot fail to regret "the old domestic morals of the land"—

<sup>1</sup> Cp. an eloquent paragraph in preface to second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, "To this knowledge, etc." where he speaks of the "transfiguration" of science by poetry.



Sobriety, and order, and chaste love,  
And honest dealing, and untainted speech,  
And pure goodwill, and hospitable cheer,

and

The beauty of the Sabbath kept  
With conscientious reverence, etc.

But are these things absolutely incompatible? Does railway travelling necessarily destroy morality or hospitality? Need we run excursion trains on Sundays? Does modern life contain no forces which can be brought to bear on our new conditions and thus preserve the balance between action and contemplation? Surely if Providence meant us to have railways and machinery, it meant us also to make a good use of them; nay, more than that, intended them to subserve moral ends. One looks at an ancient copy of the Gospels, or Missal, or Book of Hours, and sighs over the bygone days of reverent loving care bestowed upon them; but on the whole, religion and morality have gained by the invention of printing. And perhaps the very pages in the *Excursion* describing the evils of factories and collieries, and the hopeless ignorance of some, at least, among the agricultural poor, may not have been without their effect in speeding the labours of England's philanthropists—her Brights, her Cobdens, and her Shaftesburys.

At the close of the book is a graceful description

of the parsonage and its inmates,<sup>1</sup> and here it may be observed that the Church is almost invariably represented by Wordsworth in a favourable light. He seems to have been fortunate in his acquaintance among her clergy, beginning with his own brother, who was at this time a parish priest, and with the prototype of the "Pastor" himself; her exquisite liturgy and "Authorized Version" could hardly fail to be dear to him on more grounds than one; her Occasional Services were the theme of some of his most affecting sonnets; her historical position and associations, her spirit of mingled "liberty and order," were entirely congenial to his mind. How different, we may once more observe in passing, were the religious influences under which he grew up from those under which Goethe unhappily found himself! Few things should make us more thankful for our national Church than the study of portions of *Aus meinem Leben*. It contains in a nutshell no small portion of what constitutes the difference between the German and the English mind.

<sup>1</sup> "To illustrate the relation which, in my mind, this 'Pastor' bore to the 'Wanderer,' and the resemblances between them, or rather the points of community in their nature, I likened one to an oak and the other to a sycamore" (MS. I. F.) The character of the "Solitary" was partly, though not wholly, suggested by that of a Mr. Fawcett, a dissenting preacher at the Old Jewry, who lost his mental and moral balance in consequence of what Wordsworth calls "the wild and lax opinions which had done so much towards producing the French Revolution" (*ibid.* *Memoirs*, ii. 35).

The ninth book continues to discuss the subject of education, and pleads that the State

Shall admit

An obligation, on her part, to *teach*  
Them who are born to serve her and obey ;  
Binding herself by statute to secure  
For all the children whom her soil maintains  
The rudiments of letters, and inform  
The mind with moral and religious truth,  
Both understood and practised, etc.

The poem closes with a description of a summer afternoon on Grasmere lake, followed by a gorgeous sunset, which suggests to the Priest an eloquent burst of thanksgiving and praise ; the Solitary then returns to his abode with brighter hopes, a kindlier spirit, and anticipating other and not less happy opportunities of intercourse. The "future labours," however, of which the Poet spoke were never completed.

In conclusion, the reader may be *advised* to read the whole of the *Excursion* ; should that be impossible, he is *requested* to read, at least, the first four and the eighth books ; should he feel unequal to that task, let him be *entreated* to peruse the second and fourth ; and failing that, he is hereby *enjoined* to read the second.

The *Excursion* came out in 1814 ; so did Scott's *Waverley*. Their reception by the world was somewhat different. *Waverley*, as we all know, attained an almost immediate and unexampled

popularity; one edition of the *Excursion* (500 copies) lasted the reading public for six, and another for seven years—a demand of some seventy copies per annum! This, while *Lays of the Last Minstrel* and *Waverleys* were selling by tens of thousands! Add to this the tone of ridicule indulged in by the press,<sup>1</sup> and—what to a man of Wordsworth's small means and growing family was a very real evil—the being crippled for money, and we think it is to his credit that he said nothing worse than “Let the age continue to love its own darkness; I shall continue to write with, I trust, the light of heaven upon me.”

Most of the last five books of the *Excursion*, which had been begun, as we have already seen, as early as 1795 at Racedown, were composed during the poet's residence at Allan Bank, whence he migrated with his family in 1811 to take up a temporary sojourn at the Parsonage, Grasmere. At the latter place two of his children, Catharine and Thomas, died in 1812, and are buried in Grasmere Churchyard. It is difficult to shake off an impression that the situation of the house may not have been a healthy one for the children;

<sup>1</sup> A favourable article in the *Quarterly Review*, October 1814, was from the pen of Charles Lamb, who was greatly annoyed, as his letter to Wordsworth shows, by the way “Mr. Baviad Gifford” mangled it. “It was, in point of composition, the prettiest piece of prose I ever writ; and so my sister said. That charm, if it had any, is all gone; more than a third of the substance is cut away; . . . every warm expression is changed for a nasty cold one.”

and possibly also they may have needed more comforts than were afforded by the simple and thrifty fare of its inhabitants.

The poet and his wife felt the loss deeply. Some lines of his on Catharine at three years old, "Loving she is, and tractable, though wild," seem to bring the winning little creature before us, breaking in on her grave father's musings with

The pretty round  
Of trespasses, affected to provoke  
Mock chastisement and partnership in play,

and we can well understand how the deep sorrow for the loss of two such children put a stop for a time to his poetic toils.

For us the stream of fiction ceased to flow.

Intro. to *White Doe of Rylstone*.

And forty years afterwards, as Mr. Aubrey de Vere informs us, "he described the details of their illnesses with an exactness and an impetuosity of troubled excitement such as might have been expected if the bereavement had taken place but a few weeks before it—yet at the time of the illness of one of the children it was impossible to rouse his attention to the danger. He was under the spell of poetic inspiration, and till the cloud had drifted could see nothing beyond."

The scene of such a sorrow had become unbearable to both him and his wife. Most

happily Rydal Mount was then (1813) vacant, and the family migrated thither, and there remained till he died, or rather till the death of Mrs. Wordsworth in 1859. This brings us to what may be called the summer solstice of his poetical life. Before beginning to speak of its autumnal season we must bestow a few words on two remarkable productions which belong to the period we are about to quit, his poem of the "White Doe of Rylstone," and his prose tract on the "Convention of Cintra."

The last comes first in order of time, having been written at Allan Bank in 1808-9, while Coleridge was dictating *The Friend* under the same roof. It was occasioned by what the author considered to be the unjustifiable sacrifice of Spanish and Portuguese interests by the English authorities in the Peninsula. "When circumstances seemed to be most favourable to the cause for which the British army had been sent to Spain, a Convention was signed, by which all the advantages of the crisis were forfeited, and the foes of England whom she came to repel treated with more consideration than her allies whom she came to defend." The news of this Convention was very ill received in England, and considerable blame was attached to Lord Wellington for being a party to it. His defence was one which time did much to justify. To use his own words, "he

concurred in that Convention, because the French had been allowed to reach Torres Vedras, a position from which he thought it would be almost impossible to dislodge them." His own subsequent successes, when eventually in possession of those very lines, only served to display his extraordinary military foresight.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Wordsworth's pamphlet was said by Canning to have been the most eloquent production since the days of Burke. Like some of Burke's finest productions, it was remarkable for the prominence given in it to first principles, *e.g.* :—

"In many parts of Europe (and especially in our own country) men have been pressing forward, for some time, in a path which has betrayed by its fruitfulness; furnishing them constant employment for picking up things about their feet when thoughts were perishing in their minds. While mechanic arts, manufactures, agriculture, commerce, and all those products of knowledge which are confined to gross, definite, and tangible objects, have, with the aid of experimental philosophy, been every day putting on more brilliant colours, the splendour of the imagination has been fading; sensibility, which was formerly a generous nursling of rude Nature, has been chased from its ancient range in the wide domain of patriotism and religion by a shadow calling itself good sense;

<sup>1</sup> Cp. *Quarterly Review* on Wellington, July 1815, p. 476.

calculations of presumptuous expediency—groping its way among partial and temporary consequences—have been substituted for the dictates of paramount and infallible conscience, the supreme embracer of consequences; lifeless and circumspect decencies have banished the graceful negligence and unsuspecting dignity of virtue.

“Not by bread alone is the life of man sustained; not by raiment alone is he warmed; but by the genial and vernal inmate of the breast, which at once pushes forth and cherishes . . . by elasticity under insult, and firm resistance to injury; by joy and by love; by pride, which his imagination gathers in from afar; by patience, because life wants not promises; by admiration; by gratitude, which—debasement not when his fellow-being is its object—habitually expands itself, for his elevation, in complacency towards his Creator.”

I dropped my pen; and listened to the wind,  
he says, referring to this work; and comparing its probable reception with the indifference of a world wrapped in slumber to the tempest's voice,

Thought I, th' impassioned strain,  
Which, without aid of numbers, I sustain,  
Like acceptance from the world will find.

Five hundred copies only were printed, and many of them went for waste paper. Unhappily it came rather late into the field, and took perhaps,



as Burke not unfrequently did, too high a ground of idealism for practical everyday minds—"cutting blocks with a razor." It is now a scarce and probably a valuable book, if only on that account. Copious extracts from it will be found in the Bishop of Lincoln's *Memoirs*, as well as a very interesting letter to Captain, afterwards Sir Charles, Pasley, K.C.B., *à propos* of his essay on the "Military Policy and Institutions of the British Empire." In it Wordsworth says that mere military virtues will not save a State. "The reception which the Senate gave to Terentius Varro<sup>1</sup> after the battle of Cannae is the sublimest event in human history. What a contrast to the wretched conduct of the Austrian Government after the battle of Wagram. . . . England, as well as the rest of Europe, requires . . . a new course of education, a higher tone of moral feeling, more of the grandeur of the imaginative faculties, and less of the petty processes of the unfeeling and purblind understanding that could manage the concerns of nations in the same calculating spirit with which it would set about building a house."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Quo in tempore ipso adeo magno animo civitas fuit, ut consuli ex tanta clade, cujus ipse causa maxima fuisset, redeunti et obviam itum frequenter ab omnibus ordinibus sit, et gratiae actae, quod de re publica non desperasset."—Livy, xxii. 61.

<sup>2</sup> *Memoirs*, i. 419. The following is one of a group of sonnets belonging to this period :—

And is it among rude untutor'd dales,  
There, and there only, that the heart is true?

As late as 1840 Wordsworth says of his pamphlet, to a friend, Professor Reed of Philadelphia: "The respect which, in common with all the rest of the rational part of the world, I bear for the Duke of Wellington will prevent my reprinting the pamphlet during his lifetime." And he encloses a copy of his sonnet on Haydon's portrait of the Duke supposed to be on the field of Waterloo twenty years after the battle. "By Art's bold privilege," etc. A noble group of sonnets belonging to the "Convention of Cintra" period may be found in part ii. of "Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty."

A far different keynote is struck in the "White Doe of Rylstone." If we have the masculine side of fortitude displayed in the sonnets, we have what may be called its feminine side in the beautiful portrait of "the consecrated Emily," the last of the Nortons. Wordsworth himself predicted that the poem would never be popular, and only published

And, rising to repel or to subdue,  
Is it by rocks and woods that man prevails?  
Ah, no! though Nature's dread protection fails,  
There is a bulwark in the *soul*. This knew  
Iberian burghers when the sword they drew  
In Zaragoza, naked to the gales  
Of fiercely-breathing war. The truth was felt  
By Palafox, and many a brave compeer,  
Like him, of noble birth and noble mind;  
By ladies, meek-eyed women without fear;  
And wanderers of the street, to whom is dealt  
The bread which, without industry, they find.

it under strong pressure from his wife and sister. Being in the metre of the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* it inevitably provoked comparison with Scott. And though it may be doubted whether in the whole of Scott's works there be anything so truly poetical as the description of Bolton Abbey and the opening canto of the "White Doe," yet it must be owned, after all, that a story ought to be a story. All the great storytellers of the world feel this: Homer, Herodotus, Chaucer, and Scott himself. Of the reader of such works it may be said—

Succhi amari *ingannato* intanto ei beve  
E dall' inganno suo vita riceve.

But there is no "inganno" about the "White Doe." We swallow a great deal of moralising *consciously*. The figure of Emily is beautiful; so is the Doe; so is a great deal of the poetry—more especially the description of Rylstone Hall by moonlight, in canto iv.,<sup>1</sup>—but both in the tragedy of *The*

<sup>1</sup> From cloudless ether looking down,  
The moon, this tranquil evening, sees  
A camp, and a beleaguer'd town,  
And castle like a stately crown  
On the steep rocks of winding Tees;  
And, southward far, with moors between,  
Hill-tops, and floods, and forests green,  
The bright moon sees that valley small  
Where Rylstone's old sequester'd hall  
A venerable image yields  
Of quiet to the neighbouring fields;  
While from one pillar'd chimney breathes

*Borderers* and in this poem the plot is hardly strong enough to bear the weight of ethical sentiments which it has to convey. Let us, however, hear the author in his own defence. "Sir Walter Scott pursued the customary and very natural course of conducting an action, presenting various turns of fortune, to some outstanding point on which the mind might rest as a termination or catastrophe. The course I attempted to pursue is entirely different. Everything that is attempted

The silver smoke, and mounts in wreaths.  
 The courts are hush'd ; for timely sleep  
 The greyhounds to their kennel creep ;  
 The peacock in the broad ash tree  
 Aloft is roosted for the night.  
 He who in proud prosperity  
 Of colours manifold and bright  
 Walk'd round, affronting the daylight ;  
 And higher still, above the bower  
 Where he is perch'd, from yon lone tower  
 The hall-clock in the clear moonshine  
 With glittering finger points at nine.  
 Ah ! who could think that sadness here  
 Had any sway—or pain—or fear ?  
 A soft and lulling sound is heard  
 Of streams inaudible by day ;  
 The garden pool's dark surface—stirr'd  
 By the night insects in their play—  
 Breaks into dimples small and bright ;  
 A thousand, thousand rings of light  
 That shape themselves and disappear  
 Almost as soon as seen ; and lo !  
 Not distant far the milk-white doe :  
 The same fair creature which was nigh,  
 Feeding in tranquillity,  
 When Francis utter'd to the maid  
 His last words in the yew-tree shade :

by the principal personages in the 'White Doe' *fails*, so far as its object is external and substantial ; so far as it is moral and spiritual it succeeds. . . . The anticipated beatification, if I may say so, of her mind, and the apotheosis of the companion of her solitude, are the points at which the poem aims, and constitute its legitimate catastrophe ; far too *spiritual* a one for instant or widely spread sympathy, but not, therefore, the less fitted to make a deep and permanent impression upon that class of minds who think and feel more independently than the many do of the surfaces of things, and interests transitory because belonging more to the outward and social forms of life than to its internal spirit."

This is very true and very beautiful ; the only

The same fair creature, who hath found  
Her way into forbidden ground ;  
Where now within this spacious plot  
For pleasure made, a goodly spot,  
With lawns, and beds of flowers, and shades  
Of trellis-work in long arcades,  
And cirque and crescent framed by wall  
Of close-clipp'd foliage green and tall,  
Converging walks, and fountains gay,  
And terraces in trim array,—  
Beneath yon cypress spiring high,  
With pine and cedar spreading wide  
Their darksome boughs on either side,  
In open moonlight doth she lie ;  
Happy as others of her kind,  
That, far from human neighbourhood,  
Range unrestricted as the wind—  
Through park, or chase, or savage wood.

question is whether a poem can (so to speak) begin in the physical and end in the spiritual world. In so doing we seem to be on a different plane, or using a different medium. A purely spiritual dénouement to an action on the face of this earth seems like the real gold with which Cimabue and his contemporaries surrounded the heads of their Madonnas: an excellent thing in itself, but not quite in place there. Should the old Aristotelian definition of tragedy be objected to us here, we may observe that in Greek tragedy the supernatural is usually *embodied* in the person of god, prophet, portent, or oracle. The White Doe would have been (we will say) recognised as a mark of the favour of Artemis, and our interest in her not merely due to what may be called *subjective* influences—the inner workings of Emily's heart. The Book of Job, of which all the action is contained in the earliest and the latest chapters, shows, one may think, a deeper acquaintance with human nature when it gives the Patriarch a double portion of wealth and a numerous and beautiful progeny at the end. However, this is opening a large and difficult question. At any rate the "White Doe" is well worth reading, and will have a peculiar charm for any who know Bolton Abbey and its neighbourhood—one of the loveliest parts of Yorkshire, as well as the most easily accessible, being within

a short railway journey of Leeds; they should also not fail to connect with it Wordsworth's other poem, "The Force of Prayer; or, the Founding of Bolton Priory," and to visit Barden Tower and "The Strid"; indeed the whole of this part of Wharfedale, if time permitted, would be admirable ground for a walking tour. Of the "Founding of Bolton Priory" Lamb writes:—

"I never saw parental love carried up so high, towering above the other loves. Shakspeare had done something for the filial, in Cordelia, . . . he left it for you to explore the depths of the maternal heart. I get stupid, and flat, and flattering; what's the use of telling you what good things you have written, or—I hope I may add—that I know them to be good? *À propos*, when I first opened upon the just-mentioned poem, in a careless tone I said to Mary, as if putting a riddle, '*What is good for a bootless bene?*' to which, with infinite presence of mind (as the jest-book has it), she answered, '*A shoeless pea.*' It was the first joke she ever made. Excuse my levity on such an occasion. I never felt deeply in my life if that poem did not make me feel" (*Letters*, vol. i.)

## CHAPTER VII

RYDAL—1813

As the reader will discover for himself, more than half of the present biographical sketch is taken up with the earlier portion of Wordsworth's life. As is the case with all springtides, it possesses a fascination which the summer cannot boast; the latter may be beautiful, dignified, satisfactory, but the delicious surprises of April are no longer there. So it is (to speak somewhat roughly) with the Rydal Wordsworth as contrasted with the Grasmere and pre-Grasmere Wordsworth. As Mr. Myers has very truly observed: "For some twenty years at most (1798-1818) Wordsworth possessed the gift of melody. During those years he wrote works which profoundly influenced mankind. The gift then left him; he continued as wise and as earnest as ever, but his poems had no longer any potency, nor his existence much public importance."

Without quite subscribing to the two last



clausés, we may fairly own that Wordsworth's most important work was done before he took up his abode at Rydal. As happens with many other great men and institutions, while his fame was growing he was ceasing to possess the peculiar gifts of freshness and originality to which that fame was due. The "Ecclesiastical Sonnets," for instance, have some of them high poetical merit, but the feeling with which we listen to them is quite distinct from the thrill of unexpected pleasure which we receive from the "Daffodils," or the *serrement de cœur* produced by—

"O mercy!" to myself I cried,

"If Lucy should be dead."

Between the years 1814-16 Wordsworth's interest in his eldest son John's education led him to resume his early studies, and a group of poems—"Laodamia,"<sup>1</sup> "Dion," the "Ode to Lycoris," some fine lines on "The Pillar of Trajan," and a

<sup>1</sup> TO HIS NEPHEW, JOHN WORDSWORTH (1831)

"H. is out, as you are, about Laodamia. No stanza is omitted. The last but one is, however, substantially altered. H. disliked the alteration, but I cannot bring my mind to reject it. As first written, the heroine was dismissed to happiness in Elysium. To what purpose then the mission of Protesilaus? He exhorts her to moderate her passion; the exhortation is fruitless, and no punishment follows. So it stood: at present she is placed among unhappy ghosts for disregard of the exhortation. Virgil also places her there, but compare the two passages and give me *your* opinion. H. said any punishment stopping short of the future world would have been reasonable, but not the melancholy one I have imposed, as she was not a voluntary suicide. Who shall decide when doctors disagree?" (MS.)

translation of some books of Virgil—a portion of which may be found in the Philological Museum—were the result. Of “Laodamia” he said: “It cost me more trouble than almost anything else of equal length I have ever written.” And, we may add, it was well worth the trouble. Yet even the lofty march, the dignity, and stately moral beauty of such poems as “Laodamia” and “Dion,” poems which we should place “if not first, in the very first line,”—make us feel that a change has passed over the poet’s mind. He has to resort to books and to foreign climes for his inspiration. His muse

In sceptered pall comes sweeping by,  
and we dare not take hold of her warm hand as  
we used to do when she wore homelier apparel.

The direct influence of Virgil over Wordsworth’s mind is a very interesting subject for consideration, but still more so is the unconscious resemblance between the two poets.<sup>1</sup> In a certain way Wordsworth approaches more closely to Sophocles than to Virgil. There is a self-restraint, an austere purity and self-respect, a high ethical

<sup>1</sup> “Among the great poets of this new era” (says Professor Sellar, whose death, since these pages were written, will be long mourned as a public and private loss) “the only one known to have greatly admired Virgil, and who in his poems founded on classical subjects was influenced by him, is the one who most decidedly proclaimed his revolt against the artificial diction and representation of the school of classical imitators—the poet Wordsworth” (*Roman Poets*, “Virgil,” p. 76). Readers of Professor Sellar’s pages will feel that, in some respects, Wordsworth’s true precursor was Lucretius.

standard, a brooding feeling of the unseen world, which implies no lack of sensibility to the loveliness of this life ; a power of facing and being taught by pain, and, may we not add, of idealising, ay, venerating, the heroic element in suffering and endurance, whether in man or woman, which places these two poets on an almost unapproachably high level, especially when we remember that Wordsworth, more particularly in his earlier days, was, like Sophocles, the mouth-piece of a generation of freedom-loving men. His earlier work, too, has the reserve and suggestiveness of the great tragic poet.

Wordsworth, on the other hand, reminds us most of Virgil when he reaches, or perhaps passes, his maturity. One can never forget that Virgil, though not a court poet, was the darling of a court ; that he had at his fingers' ends all the resources of a great artist in words ; that he calculated his effects with a thoroughly trained eye ; that he belonged to a stage of civilisation when beauty had a distinct market value ; when even religion was prized as lending a certain picturesqueness to life ; and deep as was his piety, singular and astonishing as was his purity of heart, genuine and true as his love for and representations of Nature were, yet as a poet he knew almost *too* well what he was about. This is just what we feel in Wordsworth's later poems. In 1815 he

published a striking Preface<sup>1</sup> to the new edition of his poems (dedicated to Sir George Beaumont), in which he defines Fancy and Imagination, and illustrates the difference between them. This Preface should be read by all who wish to get clear conceptions on what does and does not constitute good poetry; and perhaps still greater interest attaches to the "Essay" composed at the same time, and beginning, "With the young of both sexes Poetry is like Love—a passion," and which gives a better idea than any other production of equal length with which I am acquainted of the history of English literature from the Elizabethan to the Georgian age.

It is singular to see how the tide of popularity has receded from some once well-known quarters, while it has flowed back to others, *e.g.* in the case of Shakspeare's sonnets, Wordsworth and Coleridge seem to have had almost a monopoly of admiration for them. Of Percy's *Reliques* he says: "Dr. Percy was so abashed by the ridicule flung upon his labours by the ignorance and insensibility of the persons with whom he lived, that though, whilst he was writing under a mask, he had not wanted resolution to follow his genius into the regions of true simplicity and genuine pathos (as in the exquisite ballad of Sir Cauline), yet when he appeared in

<sup>1</sup> To be found at the close of the "Popular" Edition of his works.

his own person . . . he adopted . . . a diction . . . scarcely distinguishable from the vague, the gross, and unfeeling language of the day."

Of himself he says : " The question " (whether these opinions are founded upon truth) " will be easily answered by the discerning reader who is old enough to remember the taste that prevailed when these poems were first published seventeen years ago ; who has also observed to what degree the poetry of this island has since that period been coloured by them ; and who is further aware of the unremitting hostility with which upon some principle or other they have each and all been opposed. A sketch of my own notion of the constitution of fame has been given, and as far as concerns myself, I have cause to be satisfied. The love, the admiration, the indifference, the slight, the aversion, and even the contempt, with which these poems have been received, knowing, as I do, the source within my own mind from which they have proceeded, and the labour and pains which, when labour and pains appeared needful, have been bestowed upon them, must all, if I think consistently, be received as pledges and tokens bearing the same general impression though widely different in value ;—they are all proofs that for the present time I have not laboured in vain, and afford assurances, more or less authentic, that the products of my industry will endure."

Here we see the cloud is beginning to lift, and settled fair weather is almost more certain because the sun does not come out too suddenly. Wordsworth certainly never "awoke and found himself famous." His kingdom, like a higher one of which we read in the Gospels, "came not with observation." Slowly, yet surely, his influence told on the rising generation. Yet for the present he had plenty of obloquy still to endure. "Peter Bell," published in 1819, though written twenty years before, was a butt for the sarcasm of Shelley, but obtained a quicker circulation than any of the author's previous poems. "The Waggoner," published shortly afterwards (written before 1806), and affectionately dedicated to Charles Lamb, was less successful; it needs a lover of the Lake District, or one who, like poor Lamb himself, had an exceptional sympathy for human failings, to appreciate it. The "Sonnets on the River Dud-don," published about this time (1820), have a graceful and affectionate poetical dedication, contrasting life at Rydal and at Lambeth, to his brother Christopher—

The minstrels played their Christmas tune ;

and the fine "Ode composed on an Evening of extraordinary Splendour and Beauty," which seems like an echo of the Ode "Childhood and Immortality," was composed in 1818.

Meanwhile Lord Byron's *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809), as well as his more brilliant and maturer poems, had seen the light, and their noble author rivalled, if he did not eclipse, the poetical fame of Scott, who was then in the zenith of his career as a novelist. Still, Wordsworth held fast to his principles. Some fine lines, though later in date (1834), in his "Evening Voluntaries" may be quoted here—

Not in the lucid intervals of life, . . .  
 Is Nature felt, or can be ; nor do words  
 Which practised talent readily affords,  
 Prove that her hand has touched responsive chords ;  
 Nor has her gentle beauty power to move  
 With genuine rapture and with fervent love  
 The soul of Genius, *if he dare to take*  
*Life's rule from passion craved for passion's sake,*  
 Untaught that meekness is the cherished bent  
 Of all the truly great and all the innocent.  
 But who *is* innocent ? By grace divine,  
 Not otherwise, O Nature ! we are thine.

In such lines as these the image of Byron was, as we know, present to their author's mind. He felt the lack of *real* poetic depth in Byron's character ; genius of a certain kind no one could deny to him ; and he also felt offended by the carelessness of his style. Of Shelley's style, on the other hand, he spoke with high admiration.

Meanwhile the poet's personal circumstances were becoming easier. A rich man he never was,

nor wished to be; but the office of a distributor of stamps—first for Cumberland and then for Westmoreland, conferred on him (through Lord Lonsdale's interest) about this time, in the practical discharge of which he had the assistance of an excellent clerk—considerably lightened his pecuniary burdens. His house at Rydal was very fairly commodious; the low, gray, cottage-like building so familiar to tourists, screened by fir-trees and laurels, with its terraced walks along Nab Scar, its picturesque, irregular garden where the "poor robin," the yellow poppy, the wild strawberry, and the fern flourished side by side with old-fashioned garden flowers, the green mound (a few steps below the house) whence a lovely view of Wansfell, Windermere, and Loughrigg Fell was to be seen, and the luxuriant growth of the rhododendrons and mountain ash, made the externals of his home as lovely as its inner life was loving. His surviving family was not a large one, consisting of two sons (John and William) and one daughter (Dora). By degrees he attracted a group of admirers round him. Not to mention the neighbourhood of Southey and Coleridge, such names as those of De Quincey—one of the first to appreciate his genius,—Professor Wilson, and in later days Dr. Arnold of Rugby, will occur to every one familiar with the memories of those days. Nor ought the names of his sister-in-law,



Sarah Hutchinson,<sup>1</sup> and that of his highly cultivated and warm-hearted friend, Miss Isabella Fenwick, to whose MS. notes all Wordsworth's biographers owe an incalculable debt of gratitude, to be omitted in this place ; nor yet the name of Hartley Coleridge—the "H. C. six years old" of one of Wordsworth's most unapproachably beautiful poems—

TO H. C.

SIX YEARS OLD

O Thou ! whose fancies from afar are brought ;  
Who of thy words dost make a mock apparel,  
And fittest to unutterable thought  
The breeze-like motion and the self-born carol ;  
Thou fairy voyager ! that dost float  
In such clear water, that thy boat  
May rather seem  
To brood on air than on an earthly stream ;  
Suspended in a stream as clear as sky,  
Where earth and heaven do make one imagery ;  
O blessed vision ! happy child !  
That art so exquisitely wild,  
I think of thee with many fears  
For what may be thy lot in future years.

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<sup>1</sup> Who wrote the touching lines "To a Redbreast" included in Wordsworth's poems, and to whom he addressed the "Spinning Wheel" sonnet, "Excuse is needless." The sight of her on her death-bed evoked the sonnet—

"Even so for me a vision sanctified,"

and afterwards he gave her name and that of her sister to two heights near his own residence. See lines, "Forth from a jutting ridge," etc. For another sister Joanna, see "Naming of Places," lines addressed to her.

I thought of times when pain might be thy guest,  
Lord of thy house and hospitality ;  
And grief, uneasy lover ! never rest  
But when she sate within the touch of thee.  
Oh ! too industrious folly !  
Oh ! vain and causeless melancholy !  
Nature will either end thee quite,  
Or, lengthening out thy season of delight,  
Preserve for thee, by individual right,  
A young lamb's heart among the full-grown flocks.

What hast thou to do with sorrow,  
Or the injuries of to-morrow ?  
Thou art a dew-drop, which the morn brings forth,  
Not framed to undergo unkindly shocks ;  
Or to be trail'd along the soiling earth ;  
A gem that glitters while it lives ;  
And no forewarning gives ;  
But, at the touch of wrong, without a strife,  
Slips in a moment out of life.

Wordsworth's half-paternal care for Hartley Coleridge is fresh in the memory of those who—yearly growing fewer—recall old Rydal and Grasmere days. Among his correspondents, too, should be mentioned his old friend, Archdeacon Wrangham, Professor (afterwards Sir William) Hamilton, of the Observatory, Dublin, the Rev. Alexander Dyce, and many others.

With his brother Christopher he maintained a pretty constant correspondence. The latter became Master of Trinity in 1820, and both he

and his three sons,<sup>1</sup> John, Charles, and Christopher, were ardent admirers of their uncle's poems ; and no doubt the fact that "young Cambridge," from 1830 or earlier, was so largely Wordsworthian, was due in some degree to the influence of Trinity Lodge, where the poet was—as his sonnets on King's College Chapel and the portrait of Henry VIII remind us—a not unfrequent visitor. We must not however anticipate, but say a word or two on Wordsworth's "Ecclesiastical Sonnets," which were partly due to the fact that, after a Continental tour in 1820, of which some poetical "Memorials" were afterwards published, Wordsworth passed a few days with Sir G. Beaumont, who was building a church at Coleorton. This led to conversations on Church history, and by degrees the subject fructified and developed in the poet's mind. No doubt the studies in ecclesiastical history, both of his brother and Mr. Southey, tended to draw his thoughts in the same direction. But it is not a little interesting to reflect that all this was before the Tractarian movement was even thought of, and that the tribute paid in one of these sonnets to Archbishop Laud, in regard to which the poet stated

<sup>1</sup> "Depend upon it, my dear brother, that if it pleased God I should survive you, I shall not be wanting in rendering every service in my power to your sons. It could be no less my duty than my gratification to do so. They are fine young men, and I feel strongly attached to them."—*W. to C. W.* MS. 9th April 1826.

in his old age that "my opinion is not in the least changed," is all the more remarkable. While it is surely very well worthy of note that the Church, at a period in her history of which we are apt to speak and think as the "dark ages," should have exercised so potent an influence on a nature so independent as Wordsworth's; and this thought may lead us to ask ourselves whether the essentials of Churchmanship are contained within quite such narrow limits, or dependent on such elaborateness of detail in the performance of her spiritual functions, as we are sometimes inclined to suppose. The question of "Catholic Emancipation," as it was called, was a burning one at this time, and this also attracted Wordsworth's mind into ecclesiastical channels. His own feeling against the Bill was very strong, and expressed with much earnestness.

It may surprise some of us that Wordsworth, who in his youth was for a while dazzled by the brilliant promise (never fulfilled) of the French Revolution, should in maturer years have opposed a measure which commended itself to many persons of moderate minds, as this Bill undoubtedly did. It is, no doubt, partly to be accounted for by his strong Protestant sympathies, which implied hatred and distrust of what he considered Papal aggression in any form; partly by his warm attachment to the Church, which had

influenced both his affections and his imagination, while she satisfied his reason in a way Romanism could never have done ("I would lay down my life," he said on one occasion in Sara Coleridge's hearing, "for the Church"); and partly by the strong conservatism which in his case, as in Burke's, was only a different phase of the same well-balanced and lofty-minded patriotism which had earlier shown itself in a love of liberty and progress. Add to this the sympathy which existed between him and his brother the Master of Trinity—a sympathy evinced in correspondence of which a large portion now lies before me as I write; and the very nature of the poet's own mind and circumstances—a mind which from its very self-sufficing fulness was not, as he grew older, readily susceptible of new impressions; and the circumstances of isolation and defective eyesight under which he lived,—and we can hardly wonder at his writing as he did. He says in a letter to Southey: "There is another point might be insisted upon (in an article in the *Quarterly Review*) more expressly than you have done—the danger, not to say the absurdity, of Roman Catholic legislation for the property of a *Protestant* Church, so inadequately *represented in Parliament* as ours is. The Convocation is gone; clergymen are excluded from the House of Commons, and the bishops are at the beck of

Ministers. I boldly ask what real property of the country is so inadequately represented ; it is a mere mockery.—Most affectionately yours,

“W. W.”

Whatever may be thought of the question then under discussion, which is obviously one unfitted to be treated of in these pages, there can be no doubt of the truth of these last words, even at the present day, when Convocation is no longer silenced.

But to return.

Among the letters of which the second volume of the *Memoirs* of Wordsworth is full, may be found some excellent ones on education—a subject on which he was singularly well fitted to speak—which are an abiding proof of the good sense which accompanied his genius.

A few extracts may be given.

The first is to a friend who had written to consult him on the education of a daughter, evidently a lively and over-sensitive child. “She will,” the poet says, “in the company of others have too constant a craving for sympathy. She will be too easily pleased, apt to overrate the merits of new acquaintances, subject to fits of over-love and over-joy, in absence from those she loves full of fears and apprehensions, etc., injurious to her health ; her passions for the most part will be happy and

good, but she will be too little mistress of them. The distinctions which her intellect will make will be apt, able, and just, but in conversation she will be prone to overshoot herself, and commit eloquent blunders through eagerness. In fine, her manners will be frank and ardent, but they will want dignity; and want of dignity will be the general defect of her character. . . . How then is the evil to be softened down or prevented? Assuredly not by mortifying her, which is the course commonly pursued with such tempers; nor by preaching to her about her own defects; nor by overrunning her infancy with books about good boys and girls, and bad boys and girls, and all that trumpery; but . . . by putting her in the way of acquiring without measure or limit such knowledge as will lead her out of herself, such knowledge as is interesting for its own sake; things known because they are interesting, not interesting because they are known; in a word, by leaving her at liberty to luxuriate in such feelings and images as will feed her mind in silent pleasure. This nourishment is contained in fairy tales, romances, the best biographies and histories, and such parts of natural history relating to the powers and appearances of the earth and elements, and the habits and structure of animals, as belong to it, not as an art or science, but as a magazine of form and feeling. This kind of knowledge is purely good, a direct antidote to

every evil to be apprehended, and food absolutely necessary to preserve the mind of a child like yours from morbid appetites. Next to these objects comes such knowledge as, while it is chiefly interesting for its own sake, admits the fellowship of another sort of pleasure, that of complacency from the conscious exercise of the faculties and love of praise. The accomplishments of dancing, music, and drawing rank under this head ; grammar, learning of languages, botany probably, and out-of-the-way knowledge of arts and manufactures, etc. The second class of objects, as far as they tend to feed vanity and self-conceit, are evil ; but let them have their just proportion in the plan of education, and they will afterwards contribute to destroy these, by furnishing the mind with power and independent gratification ; the vanity will disappear, and the good will remain. Lastly comes that class of objects which are interesting almost solely because they are known, and the knowledge may be displayed ; and this, unfortunately, comprehends three-fourths of what, according to the plan of modern education, children's heads are stuffed with ; that is, minute or trifling facts in geography, topography, natural history, chronology, etc., or acquisitions in art, or accomplishments which the child makes by rote, and which are quite beyond its age ; things of no value in themselves but as they show cleverness ;



things hurtful to any temperament, but to a child like yours absolute poison. . . . Your child, above all, should, I might say, be chained down to the severest attention to truth—I mean to the minutest accuracy in everything that she relates ; this will strike at the root of evil by teaching her to form correct notions of present things, and will steadily strengthen her mind.”

The above letter was probably written about 1806 ; its admirable good sense will commend it to every one who has had to do with education ; the next is to Archdeacon Wrangham in 1808, and ably sketches the condition of the labouring man ;, the subject of the letter is the choice of books for the rural poor, who, William Wordsworth says, are little disposed to read :—

“The labouring man in agriculture generally carries on his work either in solitude or with his own family—with persons whose minds he is thoroughly acquainted with, and with whom he is under no temptation to enter into discussion or to compare opinions. He goes home from the field, or the barn, and within and about his own house he finds a hundred little jobs which furnish him with a change of employment which is grateful and profitable ; then comes supper and bed. This for weekdays. For Sabbaths, he goes to church with us often or mostly twice a day ; on coming home some one turns to the Bible, finds the text,

and probably reads the chapter whence it is taken, or perhaps some other ; and in the afternoon the master or mistress frequently reads the Bible, if alone ; and on this day the mistress of the house *almost always* teaches the children to read, or as they express it, hears them a lesson ; or if not thus employed, they visit their neighbours, or receive them in their own houses as they drop in, and keep up by the hour a slow and familiar chat. This kind of life, of which I have seen much, and which I know would be looked upon with little complacency by many religious persons, is peaceable, and as innocent as . . . we have a right to expect ; besides, it is much more intellectual than a careless observer would suppose. One of our neighbours . . . was yesterday walking with me, and as we were pacing on, talking about indifferent matters, he suddenly said to me, with great spirit and a lively smile, 'I *like* to walk where I can hear the sound of a beck.'<sup>1</sup> I cannot but think that this man, without being conscious of it, has had many devout feelings connected with the appearances which have presented themselves to him in his employment as a shepherd, and that the pleasure of his heart at that moment was an acceptable offering to the Divine Being."

He then speaks of the cheap ballads, etc., sold by hawkers, and says he has often wished that he

<sup>1</sup> Brook.

had "talents to produce songs, poems, and little histories that might circulate . . . in this way," and that some of his poems were written with this view.

He recommends public libraries for the manufacturing districts, but deprecates the books being exclusively religious. "Piety and religion will be best understood by him who takes the most comprehensive view of the human mind, and for the most part, they will strengthen with the general strength of the mind ; and this is best produced by a due mixture of direct and indirect nourishment and discipline. For example, *Paradise Lost* and *Robinson Crusoe* might be as serviceable as Law's *Serious Call*, or Melmoth's *Great Importance of a Religious Life*.<sup>1</sup> . . . But I must stop, my dear Wrangham. Begin your education at the top of society ; let the head go in the right course and the tail will follow. But what can you expect of national education conducted by a Government which for twenty years resisted the abolition of the slave trade, and annually debauches the morals of the people by every possible device, holding out temptation with one hand and scourging with the other ? The distilleries and lotteries are a standing record that the Government cares nothing for the morals of the people,

<sup>1</sup> See *Prelude*, v. "Books," which every one should read if he can.

and that all which they want is their money. But wisdom and justice are the only true sources of the revenue of a people ; preach this, and may you not preach in vain !”

The beautiful thought in this letter, of the poor man’s *unconscious* feelings of devotion, may remind us of the

Glad hearts ! without reproach or blot,  
of the “Ode to Duty,” and the sonnet, “It is a  
beauteous Evening, calm and free,” ending—

God being with thee when we know it not.

The little anecdote<sup>1</sup> of his being in the Isle of Man when the party had a disagreeable drunken guide to the Tynwald Hill—“I found more agreeable company in some little children, one of whom, upon my request, recited the Lord’s Prayer to me, and I helped her to a clearer understanding of it as well as I could ; but I was not at all satisfied with my own part ; hers was much better done ; and I am persuaded that, like other children, she knew more about it than she was able to express, especially to a stranger”—is a prose poem in itself.

There is a long and striking letter to Rev. H. J. Rose—who had had a conversation with him on education—*à propos* of Dr. Bell’s Madras System, in which the poet lays down that “great principles

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs*, ii. 246.

are not to be sacrificed to shifts and expedients." For which reason he objects to "excellent ladies forming themselves into committees" to provide baby-linen, and thus "preclude the poor mother from the strongest motive human nature can be actuated by for industry, forethought, and self-denial. When the stream has thus been poisoned at its fountainhead we proceed by separating, through infant schools, the mother from the child, and from the rest of the family," etc. "Now these people . . . confound *education* with *tuition*." After dwelling on this distinction he goes on to protest (what would he have said now?) against the method of instruction itself. "I recollect seeing a German babe stuffed with beer and beef, who had the appearance of an infant Hercules. *He* might have had enough in him of the old Teutonic blood to grow up to a strong man, but tens of thousands would dwindle and perish after such unreasonable cramming. . . . The diet the patrons of these schools offer is not the natural diet for infant and juvenile minds. The faculties are overstrained, and not exercised with that simultaneous operation which ought to be aimed at as far as is practicable. Natural history is taught in infant schools by pictures stuck up against walls, and such mummery. A moment's notice of a redbreast pecking by a winter's hearth is worth it all."

Yes ; but what if you live in Whitechapel in half a cellar, and perhaps have never seen a red-breast except on a Christmas card ? We sympathise more with the writer of this letter in what he says of the dangers of emulation and the evils of gratuitous instruction. "Can a child be grateful to a corporate body for his instruction, or grateful even to the Lady Bountiful of the neighbourhood, with all the splendour that he sees about her, as he would be grateful to his poor father and mother, who spare from their scanty provision a mite for the culture of his mind at school ?" After speaking of the religious tone of the old grammar schools he adds : "We have no guarantee on the social condition of these well-informed pupils for the use they may make of their power and their knowledge ; the scheme points not to man as a religious being ; its end is an unworthy one, and its means do not pay respect to the order of things. Try the Mechanics' Institutes and the London University, etc. etc., by this test. The powers are not co-ordinate with those to which this nation owes its virtues and its prosperity. Here is, in one case, a sudden abstraction of a vital principle, and in both an unnatural and violent pushing on. . . . And instruction, where religion is expressly excluded, is little less to be dreaded than that by which it is trodden under foot."

Again (to his brother, Dr. Wordsworth, 1830) :

“The more I reflect upon the subject, the more I am convinced that positive instruction, even of a religious character, is much overrated. The education of man, and above all of a Christian, is the education of *duty*, which is most forcibly taught by the business and concerns of life, of which, even for children, especially the children of the poor, book-learning is but a small part. There is an officious disposition on the part of the upper and middle classes to precipitate the tendency of the people towards intellectual culture in a manner subversive of their own happiness and dangerous to the peace of society. It is mournful to observe of how little avail are lessons of piety taught at school if household attentions and obligations be neglected in consequence of the time taken up in school tuition, and the head be stuffed with vanity from the gentlemanliness of the employment of reading. Farewell. W. W.”

We may compare the magnificent lines in the *Excursion*, book iv., near the beginning—

And what are things Eternal?—Powers depart,  
Possessions vanish, and opinions change,  
And Passions hold a fluctuating seat :  
But, by the storms of circumstance unshaken,  
And subject neither to eclipse nor wane,  
Duty exists ;—immutably survive  
For our support, the measures and the forms,  
Which an abstract Intelligence supplies ;  
Whose kingdom is, where Time and Space are not.

If it be objected to the writer of these letters that he holds up an ideal but does not attempt to offer any practical method of overcoming the difficulties which stand in the way of its realisation, it might be replied that it is something to *have* an ideal. "For the hardness of our hearts" we all have in these days to tolerate educational and social evils which none of us can help regretting. As William Wordsworth says at the close of the letter to Mr. Rose already quoted:<sup>1</sup> "Circumstances have forced this nation to do, by its manufacturers, an undue portion of the dirty and unwholesome work of the globe." And it is just those among us who are in any way brought into contact with the great commercial, charitable, or educational organisations of the present day whom it specially behoves to bear these ideals in mind. All ideals have to fight their way through a tangle of complex opposition; they, or rather their supporters, usually belong to that class of strong minorities whence the saviours of society are drawn; they never are perfectly realised; yet the world would be a miserable place without them. And such a mind as Wordsworth's is the best corrective of the tendencies of his own (and our) age. The more mechanical our life becomes, the more we ought to read him, just as we read Plato, not slavishly to act upon the letter of his theories, but to feed

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs*, ii. 185-192.



on and to assimilate and to reproduce, as far as in us lies, and in our own callings, the spirit which dictated them.<sup>1</sup>

A considerable portion of his correspondence on the subject of the Reform Bill of 1830 cannot be inserted in these pages. He was vehemently opposed to the measure, and a good deal of what has been said on the subject of Catholic Emancipation is applicable also here. He was at that time sixty years of age—a time when most men are naturally conservative—and he seems to have been more keenly alive to the evils of reform “as a step towards household suffrage, vote by ballot,” etc.—evils which, as we find to-day, are by no means imaginary—than he was to those of the old system. After all, was he entirely wrong in saying, “I cannot see how the Government is to be carried on but *by such sacrifices to the democracy*

<sup>1</sup> A “Postscript” to the volume of his poems containing “Yarrow Revisited,” published in 1834, and dealing with the political and social questions of the day, is remarkable for advocating “a repeal of such laws as prevent the formation of joint-stock companies. The combinations of masters to keep down, unjustly, the price of labour would be fairly checked by these associations; they would encourage economy, inasmuch as they would enable a man to draw profit from his savings by vesting them in buildings or machinery for processes of manufacture with which he was habitually connected. His little capital would then be working for him when he was at rest or asleep; he would more clearly perceive the necessity of capital for carrying on great works; he would better learn to respect the larger portions of it in the hands of others; he would be less tempted to join in unjust combinations, and . . . slow to promote local disturbance or endanger public tranquillity” (p. 334).

*as will sooner or later upset everything.* Whoever governs, it will be by outbidding for popular favour those who went before them " ?

Is this prophecy quite a dead letter in our day ?

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE TURN OF THE TIDE

IN the decade 1830-40, and onwards, we find Wordsworth entering on a new phase of his life. He is no longer the struggling and despised author, upheld only by a small but devoted band of followers, but a distinguished poet, *the* distinguished poet, perhaps, of the day. We cannot open a book of memoirs which treats of London society in those days without finding his name, now breakfasting with Rogers, and rather cruelly quoting Horace's "Linguenda tellus," etc., at his affluent brother-poet's well-spread table; now dining in company with Carlyle, and peaceably munching almonds and raisins (while the rest of the world was talking) behind a little green shade, which he had produced out of his pocket and set up between his eyes and the candle; now sitting to Chantrey for his admirable bust; now in company with Lockhart or Sir Walter Scott<sup>1</sup>; not unfrequently

<sup>1</sup> "We are just setting off for Hampton Court," writes Dora to

at Hampstead with Mrs. Hoare, the kind friend of the Master of Trinity and his sons, where Caroline Fox's reminiscences of him will be found among the happiest on record; once pointedly drinking Mr. Browning's<sup>1</sup> health at an assembly of poets, among whom *he* was the youngest and least known. One or two sketches of him from contemporary pens may be introduced here.

"I did not perceive," says H. C. Robinson (November 1820), "that Wordsworth enjoyed the Elgin marbles much, but he is a still man when he does enjoy himself, and by no means ready to talk of his pleasures, except to his sister. . . . I think that his enjoyment of works of art is very much in proportion to their subserviency to poetical illustration. I doubt whether he feels the beauty of mere form."

Thomas Moore says (27th October 1820): "Wordsworth . . . spoke of the Scottish Novels. Is sure they are Scott's. . . . Said that great fertility was the characteristic of all novelists and story-tellers. . . . Scott, since he was a child, accustomed to legends, and to the exercise of the story-telling faculty; sees nothing to stop him so long as he

her cousin Christopher, 26th May 1828, "with Sir Walter Scott; his daughter, Mrs. Lockhart, will accompany us—a delightful person; one of my father's lovers, or rather (*sic*) she of his" (MS.)

<sup>1</sup> "So Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett are married," Wordsworth writes. "It is to be hoped they will understand one another, for no one else can understand either of them!"

can hold a pen. Spoke of the very little real knowledge of poetry that existed now, so few men had time to study. . . . Mr. Fox, indeed, towards the latter part of his life, made leisure for himself ; . . . accordingly all his later public displays bore a greater stamp of wisdom and good taste than his early ones. Mr. Burke alone was an exception to this description of public men ; by far the greatest man of his age, not only abounding in knowledge himself, but feeding . . . his most able contemporaries, assisting Adam Smith in his *Political Economy*, and Reynolds in his *Lectures on Painting*. Fox, too, who acknowledged that all he had ever learnt from books was nothing to what he had derived from Burke."

"You always," said Wordsworth to B. R. Haydon, "went from Burke with your mind filled, from Fox with your feelings excited, and from Pitt with wonder at his power to make the worse appear the better reason."

Haydon says of him, after a walk with him one spring morning (1815): "Never did any one so beguile the time as Wordsworth. His purity of heart, his kindness, his soundness of principle, his information, his knowledge, and the intense and eager feeling with which he pours forth all he knows, affect, interest, and enchant me. I do not know any one I would be so inclined to worship as a purified being."

WORDSWORTH TO W. S. LANDOR<sup>1</sup>

"I met with a hundred things in your Dissertation that fell in with my own judgments, but there are many opinions which I should like to talk over with you. . . . Are you not penurious in your praise of Gray? The fragment at the commencement of his fourth book, in which he laments the death of West, in cadence and sentiment touches me in a manner for which I am grateful. . . . Is there not a speech of Solon to which the concluding couplet of Gray's sonnet bears a more pointed resemblance than to any of the passages you have quoted? He was told not to grieve for the loss of his son, as tears would be of no avail; 'and for that very reason,' replied he, 'do I weep.' It is high time I should thank you for the honourable mention you have made of me. It could not but be grateful to me to be praised by a poet who has written verses of which I would rather have been the author than of any produced in our time. What I now write to you I have frequently said to many.

"RYDAL, 3d September 1821."<sup>2</sup>

Mr. T. C. Grattan, who met the two poets—Coleridge and Wordsworth—in a tour on the Rhine in 1828, after describing somewhat

<sup>1</sup> Knight, xi. 93.

<sup>2</sup> For these and other extracts I am indebted to Professor Knight's valuable *Life of Wordsworth*.

unflatteringly Wordsworth's personal appearance, and saying he was more like "a mountain farmer than a lake poet," continues: "But, on after observation . . . I could not help considering that much that seemed unfavourable in Wordsworth might be really placed to his advantage. There was a total absence of affectation or egotism, not the least effort at display or assumption of superiority over any of those who were quite prepared to concede it to him. He seemed satisfied to let his friend and fellow-traveller take the lead, with a want of pretension rarely found in men of literary reputation far inferior to his; while there was something unobtrusively amiable in his bearing towards his daughter." After contrasting Wordsworth's somewhat "pedestrian" style of conversation with the wonderful attraction of Coleridge, and Wordsworth's insatiable curiosity at Waterloo and Quatre Bras after every detail about the spots where officers had fallen, etc., with Coleridge's ecstasies over the peasant children, Wordsworth's matter-of-fact and practical inquiries with Coleridge's absence of mind and poetical abstraction, Mr. Grattan adds a description of a *tête-à-tête* walk with the former poet among the rocks above Dinant (on the Meuse). "We took off our coats, threw them across our arms, and trudged along. W. had quite the figure and air of a sturdy mountaineer in search of a stray sheep or

goat." During "a scorching ramble of more than two hours, Wordsworth *expanded* amazingly, and gave me a much more favourable opinion of himself and his powers than I had heretofore conceived, but not all at once. There were no bursts of information, but a gradual development of it. . . . He talked of painting, sketching, and many other subjects suggested by the scene. But he did not, after all, talk like a painter, or a philosopher, and not one bit like a poet."

Poor, poor Wordsworth! one feels inclined to say.

"I never saw," says Julian Charles Young at about the same date, "any manifestation of small jealousy between Coleridge and Wordsworth. . . . Wordsworth, though he could discourse most eloquent music, was never unwilling to sit still in Coleridge's presence, yet could be as happy in prattling with a child as in communing with a sage. . . . He chatted naturally and fluently, out of the fulness of his heart, and not from a wish to display his eloquence. His eyes would fill with tears and his voice falter as he dwelt on the benevolent adaptation of means to ends discernible by reverential observation."<sup>1</sup>

"There was," says Miss Hamilton, "a slight touch of rusticity and constraint about his perfect gentlemanliness of manner which I liked—an

<sup>1</sup> Knight, xi. 138, 139.



absence of that *entire* ease of manner towards strangers which always tends to do away with my sympathy with any mind, particularly a gifted one; but everything he said and did had an unaffected simplicity and dignity and peacefulness of thought that were very striking. He was not at all a loquacious man, nor one who seemed inclined to approach with any degree of intimacy even those whom he knew a great deal, but at the same time one who met every advance on the part of others with a ready and attractive affability.”<sup>1</sup>

On the “first night” of Talfourd’s tragedy of *Ion* (26th May 1836), we are told:—

“In the next box to Joanna Baillie sat William Wordsworth, and the great poet was of course an object of not a little attention. As soon as he entered the house he was recognised and loudly cheered. Whether he was ignorant that the compliment was intended for him or not I cannot tell, but he did not notice it. He leaned over and shook hands with Joanna, and then sat down, removed his green spectacles, and leaning his thoughtful-looking head on his hand, gazed round the house, nodding to one and another as he recognised them. . . . He looked more like a man borne down by some heavy grief than a profound thinker. His smile, when he chanced to greet any acquaintance, was a solemn affair, and it speedily

<sup>1</sup> Knight, xi. 167.

vanished. . . Mrs. Sigourney, the American poetess, said she had remarked the same sad look even when surrounded by his own family. During the whole of the tragedy (nearly five hours) W. did not leave his seat, and frequently . . . applauded portions of the piece. Indeed he thumped with his stick most lustily ; and if Talfourd saw him he must have been not a little gratified." <sup>1</sup>

Leigh Hunt, who had met him in 1815, says : "I did not see this distinguished person again till thirty years afterwards, when, I should venture to say, his manner was greatly superior to what it was in the former instance—indeed, quite natural and noble, with a cheerful air of animal as well as spiritual confidence, a gallant bearing, curiously reminding me of the Duke of Wellington. . . . He no longer committed himself in scornful criticisms ; . . . he had found out that he could at least afford to be silent. . . . His eyes," he says, "were not beautiful, but certainly I never beheld eyes that looked so inspired or supernatural. They were like fires half-burning, half-smouldering, with a sort of acrid fixture of regard, and seated at the farther end of two caverns. One might imagine Ezekiel or Isaiah to have had such eyes" (Hunt's *Autobiography*, pp. 247-249).

The general impression which seems to have been left on people's minds was that he talked a

<sup>1</sup> John Dix (Ross), *ibid.* 265.

good deal about himself and his own poems. Perhaps some excuse may be found for this in the great simplicity of his character. Most men like to talk about themselves under due encouragement; but they are much more keenly alive to the criticising self-love of others than Wordsworth was. They mean what they say, and expect others to do the same. He took the world as he found it, and though not given to obtruding himself, yet naturally supposed persons who expressed an interest in his poems really to feel it. We must remember too how much he had been thrown in on himself by the circumstances of his life. He was also keenly interested in politics, and ready to talk by the hour about them, as well as of great religious and philosophic questions. But he had no London small-talk. How should he? And he was not, like Walter Scott, a brilliant and humorous story-teller. He had not Byron's aristocratic and fashionable connection, nor Rogers's dilettantism, nor Moore's musical gifts. He was not made for small social successes, nor was he ever to be seen really in his element in London.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "What agrees with me worst of all" (he writes to his nephew, John Wordsworth) "is residence in London, late hours of dining, and talking from morning to night." He adds: "I have sent you a sonnet," probably one on the Ballot, "which I shall not print in my collection, because my poems are wholly, as I wish them to continue, without *personalities* of a vituperative character" (MS.)

We may pause for a moment and ask what were the causes of this turn of the tide. First and chiefest, the real merit of his poetry, which it took a whole generation to discover. Secondly, as has been said, the influence he exercised at Cambridge on men like Whewell, Sedgwick, Tennyson, Hallam, Trench, the Hares, and others. Thirdly, the influence which for a somewhat different reason he possessed at Oxford, where Keble, Arnold, James Mozley, and others of the rising generation, found in his religious and reverent nature a spirit akin to that which was working in their own bosoms, and of which the great "Tractarian" movement was one result. Add to this the quickened sense of natural beauty which Wordsworth had done much to awaken, and which yearly drew hundreds of visitors to the lakes,<sup>1</sup> and not the least the reactionary spirit so characteristic of human nature, and the love of rendering justice (however tardy)

<sup>1</sup> In a joint (undated MS.) letter from his sister Dorothy and himself to the Master of Trinity he says, *à propos* of the slow sale of an edition which he fears that the "Paris edition" has interfered with: "This is [otherwise] inexplicable, if any importance is to be attached to the interest which my writings have appeared to excite, as judged of from the great numbers of persons, quite strangers to me, who visit Rydal Mount, and from the acknowledgments I am daily receiving. . . . Is Chris with you? and has he recovered his good looks? His *bright* ones are always with him. Let him write to us. The other day I was agreeably surprised with a visit from Professor Sedgwick. I took a walk with him upon the mountains, my eyes being then not so bad as they are now."

so characteristic of Englishmen, and we have the secret of Wordsworth's popularity. Happily for him he belonged to a healthy and long-lived race, otherwise he might have been among the many prophets whose sepulchres are built by the descendants of those who slew them.

The writer of this brief memoir has had access to a large pile of family letters of those days—many from the poet to his brother, the Master of Trinity. Few of those which have not already seen the light are worth publication ; but one and all have running through them the same character of absolute sincerity, unobtrusive but deep religious feeling, warm family affection, and great interest in the welfare of those connected with him. Now it is the prospects of his son or his nephew, now a new church to be built at Cocker-mouth (his own and his brother's birthplace), now there are details—given with the simplicity of the humblest family scribe—of the health of his sister or his daughter, now some talk about investments, or a county election, but there is not one particle of fine writing, not one atom of self-consciousness from beginning to end ; and this gives the letters a charm of their own, all the more real because it *cannot* be shared with the public. They may be said to be the very antipodes of Horace Walpole's. *À propos* of letter-writing, Wordsworth once said that such was his horror of having his letters

preserved, that, in order to guard against it, he always took pains to make them as bad and dull as possible. His affection for his sister, who was taken seriously ill in 1830, and never entirely recovered lost ground, is pathetic in its simple homely reality. Dora writes to "Chris" in 1838: "Nothing seems to give her pleasure, not even the sight of her dear brother . . . and often and often he comes down from her room, his eyes filled with tears, saying, 'Well, all I can do for her now is to heat her nightcap for her. I have done it twenty times within the last quarter of an hour—that seems to give her a momentary pleasure, and that is some comfort'" (MS.)

What a pendant to the lines on "Tintern Abbey," and how happy for us that we do not know at thirty what we and ours will be at seventy! Others tell how his voice always softened at the mention of her name with a tenderness in which compassion for her present state never excluded gratitude for all she had once been. He writes to Charles Lamb in 1833, thanking him "for a delightful volume, your last (I hope not) of *Elia*. The book has much pleased the whole of my family, viz. my wife, daughter, Miss Hutchinson, and my poor dear sister on her sick-bed; they all return their best thanks. I am not sure but I like the 'Old China,' and the 'Wedding,' as well as any of the Essays.

I read 'Love me and my Dog' to my poor sister this morning. . . . I have been thus particular, knowing how much you and your sister value this excellent person, whose tenderness of heart I do not honestly believe was ever exceeded by any of God's creatures. Her loving kindness has no bounds. God bless her for ever and ever!"

Taking the family correspondence as a whole, it leaves a somewhat melancholy impression on the mind, though a smile may be called up by the P.S.S. not unfrequently added by Mrs. Wordsworth or "Dora," requesting their Cambridge correspondent not to fancy they are quite so ill or miserable as "William" or "Dorothy" has represented them. In a quiet retired place the members of an affectionate family have perhaps too ample opportunities of making themselves uneasy about one another. The element of liveliness seems chiefly to have been supplied by Dora, with the occasional help of her Trinity cousins. "My father's eyes," writes Dora (MS., no date—probably about 1830), "are better, but too weak to allow of his writing or even looking at a book, and as he may not yet employ his mind, he finds these long fire-light and candle-light evenings distressing and tiresome in the extreme. My mother and I read to him a great deal, but as neither her chest nor my throat is of the very strongest,

we find it fatiguing, and he cannot always keep awake," etc. (to her cousin Christopher).

At another time she writes (no date) to the same: "I have just now as little idle time as you, for my dear father is still a blind man; but, thank God, the active inflammation has entirely subsided, . . . and he has now permission to go into the garden; for the last ten days he has been a prisoner to a dark room, and so very very patient, but not very good, for compose sonnets he will, in spite of all the dreadful threats that are held out by his medical attendants; nor will the recollection of blisters on blisters or leeches on leeches keep him quiet. Within the last few weeks he has composed upwards of forty sonnets, I believe, principally on subjects connected with his late tour (Scotland, autumn of 1833). Dear aunt goes out every day this beautiful weather, . . . and in an evening, when we are alone, she sometimes brings her work down and sits an hour or two with us."

At another time (1831) she is taking care of her father and uncle, Dr. C. Wordsworth, at the latter's Rectory of Buxted. "My uncle is gone off to Uckfield to a meeting of the magistrates—something about poor laws or rates—so you may guess what we have to expect after dinner. Father has dined once this week with Lord Liverpool; he brought home no news. He bids



me say that he misses you" ("Chris") "very much, and is more and more convinced that he cannot write any better than any one else on the subject of present affairs. . . . Your father forgot to tell you . . . to send off to Joshua Watson, Esq., three dozen of audit-ale; let Hodson bring the *Hooker*, vol. i., and all letters, papers, and *Quarterly Reviews*, and anything else too tedious to mention. This from your Daddy; my Daddy says 'anything instructive or entertaining.' I say the *Acta Sanctorum* in *seventy* vols. folio."

A few weeks later she writes to the same of her father then in London: "He is dreadfully engaged, both at breakfasts, luncheons, dinners and evening parties—employed chiefly, as he tells us, in conversing with men of all parties, hearing their opinions, and endeavouring to correct the bad ones; he is busy, is he not? He went to town about office business, but this Reform Bill has quite driven that and every other private concern out of his head; he has written us two hasty notes, but told us little except that he has a thousand things to tell, but he has not time. Mr. Quillinan sent us a most entertaining account of a visit they paid to a raving admirer of his, a schoolmaster at Brixton Hill; but you must see the letter!"

While on the subject of family affairs we may mention that his eldest son John, Rector of

Moresby, married (1830) Miss Isabella Curwen, by whom he had five sons and one daughter. The birth of the eldest grandchild called forth some heartfelt lines beginning—

Like a shipwrecked sailor tost, etc.,  
among them the following beautiful passage—

As a floating summer cloud,  
Though of gorgeous drapery proud,  
To the sun-burnt traveller,  
Or the stooping labourer,  
Of-times makes its bounty known  
By its shadow round him thrown ;  
So, by chequerings of sad cheer,  
Heavenly Guardians, brooding near,  
Of their presence tell—too bright  
Haply for corporeal sight !

In “The Warning” which follows these lines the grandfather’s joy has given place to all the old forebodings and misgivings about the future of the country—

O for a bridle bitted with remorse  
To stop your leaders in their headstrong course !

The Cassandra-like strain breaks off abruptly, and is followed by the beautiful little poem—

If this great world of joy and pain  
Revolve in one sure track ;  
If freedom, set, will rise again,  
And virtue, flown, come back ;

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Woe to the purblind crew who fill  
The heart with each day's care ;  
Nor gain, from past or future, skill  
To bear, and to forbear !

The poet's second son William married (in 1847) Fanny, daughter of Reginald Graham, Esq., by whom he had two sons and one daughter.

## CHAPTER IX

### ABBOTSFORD

"IN the autumn of 1831," says Wordsworth,<sup>1</sup> "my daughter and I set off from Rydal to visit Sir Walter Scott before his departure to Italy. . . . I was then scarcely able to lift up my eyes to the light. How sadly changed did I find him from the man I had seen so healthy, gay, and hopeful a few years before, when he said at the inn at Patterdale, in my presence, . . . 'I mean to live till I am eighty, and shall write as long as I live.' Though we had none of us the least thought of the cloud of misfortune which was then going to break upon his head, I was startled, and almost shocked, at that bold saying, etc. . . . But to return to Abbotsford. . . . In the evening Mr. and Mrs. Liddell sang, and Mrs. Lockhart chanted old ballads to her harp, and Mr. Allan (the painter), hanging over the back of a chair, told and acted odd stories in a humorous way. With this exhibition,

<sup>1</sup> MSS. I. F. *Memoirs*, p. 233.

and his daughters' singing, Sir Walter was much amused ; so indeed were we all as far as circumstances would allow."

Next day they drove to Newark Castle on the Yarrow. On alighting Scott "walked pretty stoutly, and seemed to have pleasure in revisiting his favourite haunts. . . . On our return in the afternoon we had to cross the Tweed directly opposite Abbotsford. The wheels of our carriage grated upon the pebbles in the bed of the stream that there flows somewhat rapidly ; a rich but sad light of rather a purple than a golden hue was spread over the Eildon Hills at that moment, and thinking it probable that it might be the last time Sir Walter would ever cross the stream, I was not a little moved, and expressed some of my feelings in the sonnet beginning—

A trouble, not of clouds, etc.

At noon on Thursday we left Abbotsford, and on the morning of that day Sir Walter and I had a serious conversation *tête-à-tête*, when he spoke with gratitude of the happy life which, upon the whole, he had led. He had written in my daughter's album<sup>1</sup> . . . a few stanzas addressed to her, and while putting the book into her hand in his own study, standing by his desk, he said to

<sup>1</sup> The little book had been a present from Mrs. Hemans, between whom and the Wordsworths a warm friendship subsisted.

her in my presence, 'I should not have done anything of this kind but for your father's sake ; they are probably the last verses. I shall ever write.' They show how much his mind was impaired, not in the train of thought, but in the execution." On Wordsworth's expressing a hope that he would benefit by his Italian journey, he replied in his friend's own words—

When I'm there, although 'tis fair,  
'Twill be another Yarrow.<sup>1</sup>

"I first became acquainted," Wordsworth adds, "with this great and amiable man—Sir Walter Scott—in the year 1803, when my sister and I were hospitably received by him at Lasswade."

Lockhart in his *Life* gives an affecting account of this last visit, but even he could hardly enter into the recollections which such a farewell must have involved. The two young men of 1803, so full of genius and vigour—the two old men of 1831, arrived at fame and prosperity ; the one infirm, the other half blind ; the home of the one overshadowed by the loss of his wife, that of the other by the eclipse of the bright faculties of his sister, and both full of misgivings as to the future of their country, rise before us in pathetic and striking contrast.

<sup>1</sup> Cp. "Musings near Aquapendente," *Memorials of a Tour in Italy*.

Scott's lines beginning—

'Tis well the gifted eye which saw  
The first light sparks of fancy burn,  
Should mark its latest flash with awe,  
Low glimmering from its funeral urn,

end with the touching words—

The storm might whistle round my head,  
I would not deprecate the ill,  
So I might say, when it was sped,  
My country, be thou glorious still !

Amid all the sorrow one cannot but rejoice to think of the real bond which united these two great men whose genius was so dissimilar, whose lives had been so unlike, yet who resembled one another in a fundamental sincerity and large-heartedness, in sympathy, nay, reverence for the poor and the unlettered, in uprightness and manliness of character, and in real goodness of heart, based on a religious faith which neither lost sight of in life or death.

"Yarrow Revisited"<sup>1</sup> and other poems were published early in 1835, and dedicated to Rogers "as a testimony of friendship, and acknowledgment of intellectual obligations."

These poems are like a handful of autumn leaves, tinged as they are with a grave but not painful melancholy and thoughtfulness—

<sup>1</sup> Forming, as Mr. Hutton reminds us (*Essays*, ii. 103), with the two previous poems on "Yarrow" a "most perfect triad of spiritual imaginations."

That from a threshold loved by every Muse  
 Its impulse took—that sorrow-stricken door,<sup>1</sup>  
 Whence, as a current from its fountain-head,  
 Our thoughts have issued and our feelings flowed,  
 Receiving, willingly or not, fresh strength  
 From kindred sources ; while around us sighed  
 (Life's three first seasons having passed away)  
 Leaf-scattering winds, and hoar-frost sprinklings fell  
 (Foretaste of winter) on the moorland heights ;  
 And every day brought with it tidings new  
 Of rash change, ominous for the public weal.<sup>2</sup>

But a still sadder loss was shortly<sup>3</sup> to be under-  
 gone, of one whom he might at one time almost  
 have addressed as “animæ dimidium meæ”—  
 Samuel Taylor Coleridge.<sup>4</sup> The Rev. R. Perceval  
 Graves gives a pathetic account of a visit to Rydal  
 soon after Wordsworth had received the news.  
 The poet, who sorrowed deeply for his friend, spoke  
 of Coleridge as “the most *wonderful* man he had  
 ever known—wonderful for the originality of his  
 mind and the power he possessed of throwing out

<sup>1</sup> Abbotsford.

<sup>2</sup> “An Apology.”

<sup>3</sup> 25th July 1834.

<sup>4</sup> “Wordsworth,” says H. C. Robinson in his *Diary*, “with no faint praise, then spoke of Coleridge’s mind, the powers of which he declared to be greater than those of any man he ever knew. . . . His genius he thought to be great, but his talents still greater ; and it was in the union of so much genius with so much talent that Coleridge surpasses all the men he ever knew. . . . W. observed of himself that he, on the contrary, had comparatively little talent ; genius is his characteristic quality.” It is distressing to think that the “Rock of Names” bearing the initials of Coleridge, of Wordsworth, his wife, sister, and brother John, and of Sarah Hutchinson, is to be submerged in the new reservoir at the bidding of the Corporation of Manchester.



in profusion grand central truths from which might be evolved the most comprehensive systems. He regretted that German metaphysics had so much captivated the taste of Coleridge; . . . had his energy . . . been more exerted in the channel of poetry, an instrument of which he had so perfect a mastery, . . . he might have done more to enrich the literature and influence the thought of the nation than any man of the age. . . . Coleridge and he had been for two years . . . in as close intimacy as man could be with man." The letter announcing his death told how his last act was to "call his children and other friends around him, to give them his blessing, and to express his hope to them that the manner of his death might manifest the depth of his trust in his Saviour Christ. As I heard this," says Mr. Graves, "I was deeply glad at the substance, and deeply affected by Wordsworth's emotion in reading it. When he came to this part his voice at first faltered, and then broke; but soon divine faith that the change was a blest one overcame aught of human grief, and he concluded in an equable though subdued tone."

This may be no unfit place for introducing a reminiscence of Wordsworth himself. He had, we are told,<sup>1</sup> "an entire want of confidence in highly-wrought religious expression in youth, and an utter

<sup>1</sup> By Mrs. Davy. *Memoirs*, ii. 441.

distrust of all attempts to nurse virtue by an avoidance of temptation." (This was *à propos* of college life.) "The safest training for the mind was a contemplating of the character and personal history of Christ. 'Work it,' he said, 'into your thoughts, into your imagination, make it a real presence in the mind.' I was rejoiced," says the writer, "to hear this plain, loving confession of a Christian faith from Wordsworth. I never heard one more earnest, more as if it came out of a devoutly believing heart." The same lady speaks of him as describing Coleridge's talk as like "a majestic river, the sound or sight of whose course you caught at intervals, which was sometimes concealed by forests, sometimes lost in sand, then came flashing out broad and distinct, then again took a turn which your eye could not follow, yet you knew and felt that it was the same river." "These scraps of Wordsworth's large, thoughtful, earnest discourse," she adds, "seem very meagre as I write them down . . . yet this is an evening which those who spent it in his company will long remember. His venerable head ; his simple, natural, and graceful attitude in his arm-chair ; his respectful attention to the slightest remarks or suggestions of others in relation to what was spoken of ; his kindly benevolence of expression as he looked round now and then on the circle in our little parlour, all bent to 'devour up his discourse,' filled up and enlarged the meaning."

What a charming description, too, is this written by Lady Richardson of an expedition to the River Uddon (1844). "When I went out about seven, I saw Wordsworth going a few steps and then moving on and stopping again, in a very abstracted manner, so I kept back. But when he saw me he advanced, and took me again to the churchyard to see the morning effects, which were very lovely. He said he had not slept well, that the recollection of former days had crowded upon him, and 'most of all my dear sister ; and when I thought of her state, and of those who had passed away—Coleridge, Southey, and many others, while I am left with my many infirmities, if not sins, in full consciousness—how could I sleep? and then I took to the alteration of sonnets, and that made the matter worse still.' Then suddenly stopping before a little bunch of harebell, which, along with some parsley fern, grew out of the wall near us, he exclaimed, 'How perfectly beautiful that is!

Would that the little flowers that grow could live,  
Conscious of half the pleasure that they give !'

He then expatiated on the inexhaustible beauty of the arrangements of nature, its power of combining in the most secret recesses, and that it must be for some purpose of beneficence."

Southey's death took place 21st March 1843. In the July of 1840 Wordsworth had visited him,

been recognised for a moment, when "his eyes flashed with all their former brightness, but he sank into the state in which I had found him, patting with both hands his books<sup>1</sup> affectionately like a child." It is singular that Southey, Coleridge, Scott, and Dorothy Wordsworth should all have more or less broken down in mind, and that mental trouble should have formed so large an ingredient in the history of Charles Lamb, while Hartley Coleridge could scarcely have been said to be exempt from it. Charles Lamb died in December 1834, six months after Coleridge,<sup>2</sup> Felicia Hemans in 1835, shortly after dedicating a volume of her poems to Wordsworth. An extract from a letter of hers (22nd June 1830) gives an agreeable glimpse of Rydal and its master.

After describing her nervous trepidation when the visit was in prospect, she says: "I was driven to a lovely cottage-like building, almost hidden by a profusion of roses and ivy; and a most benignant-looking old man greeted me in the porch—this was Mr. Wordsworth himself; and when I tell you that, having rather a large party of visitors in the house, he led me to a room

<sup>1</sup> "When Southey had gone," says Miss Martineau, describing a visit paid by the former to Miss Fenwick, "Dr. Arnold expressed a wonder if *he* should ever, like Southey, lose interest in things, retaining interest in books only; and Wordsworth said, 'If I must lose my interest in one of them, I would rather give up books than men.'"

<sup>2</sup> See Wordsworth's lines beginning—

"To a good man of most dear memory."

apart from them, and brought in his family by degrees, I am sure that little trait will give you an idea of considerate kindness which you will both like and appreciate. In half an hour I felt myself as much at ease with him as I had been with Sir Walter Scott in half a day. I laughed to find myself saying on the occasion of some little domestic occurrence, 'Mr. Wordsworth, how *could* you be so giddy?' He has, undeniably, a lurking love of mischief, and would not, I think, be half so safely entrusted with the tied-up bag of winds as Mr. ——— insisted that Dr. Channing might be. There is almost a patriarchal simplicity, and an absence of all pretension, about him, which I know you would like; all is free,—unstudied,—'the river winding at its own sweet will.' In his manner and conversation there is more of impulse than I had expected, but in other respects I see much that I should look for in the poet of meditative life; frequently his head droops, his eyes half close, and he seems buried in great depths of thought. I have passed a delightful morning to-day, in walking with him about his own richly-shaded grounds, and hearing him speak of the old English writers, particularly Spenser, whom he loves, as he himself expresses it, for his 'earnestness and devotedness.' It is an immeasurable transition from Spenser to ———; but I have been so much amused by Mr. Wordsworth's

characterising her as 'a tumultuous young woman,' that I cannot forbear transcribing the expression for the use of my friends. I must not forget to tell you that he not only admired our exploit in crossing the Ulverstone sands as a deed of 'derring do,' but a decided proof of taste ; the lake scenery, he says, is never seen to such advantage as after the passage of what he calls its majestic barrier."

In the year 1837 Wordsworth paid his first visit to Rome, in the company of H. Crabb Robinson, Esq., to whose kindness as a fellow-traveller he refers in the subsequent dedication of the poems then written or suggested. To those poems we might apply his own early words—

You must love him, ere to you

He will seem worthy of your love.

We read the poems rather because we already care for Wordsworth than care for Wordsworth because of reading the poems. Yet the "Musings at Aquapendente" (to say nothing of the others) *should be read*. They are a complete reflection of his state of mind<sup>1</sup> at the time, and very pathetic in the affectionateness of their reference to Scott, who had not long preceded him, and who, like him, thought of his native hills and old associations in the very presence of the classic muse. Mr. Robinson says: "When we were on that noble

<sup>1</sup> "I have matter for volumes," he said, "if I had but youth to work it up."

spot, the Amphitheatre at Nismes, I observed W.'s eyes fixed where there was least to be seen, and looking that way I beheld two very young children at play with flowers, and I overheard him say to himself, 'Oh, you darlings, I wish I could put you in my pocket, and carry you to Rydal Mount!' It is pleasant to think that he found a kindred spirit in St. Francis preaching to the birds; and of his gratification in being told (at Florence) 'You are now sitting in Dante's chair.'

Among the poems in the volume now referred to is the very early one, "Guilt and Sorrow," one called "The Forsaken"—"an overflow" (he says) "from the 'Affliction of Margaret,' and excluded as superfluous there, but preserved in the faint hope that it may turn to account by restoring a shy lover to some forsaken damsel, my poetry having been complained of as deficient in interests of this sort,"—and some other pieces, *e.g.* "Address to Scholars of Village School of [Hawkshead], written at Goslar 1798." Elsewhere he says: "Had I been a writer of love poetry it would have been natural to me to write it with a degree of warmth which could hardly have been approved by my principles, and which might have been undesirable for the reader."

With regard to another branch of the poetry of the emotions—sacred poetry—he expressed to Mr. Graves "the feelings of reverence which

prevented him from venturing to lay his hand on what he always thought a subject too high for him."<sup>1</sup> But he was shortly to receive a welcome tribute from the most distinguished writer of sacred poetry of his or indeed any generation, when John Keble, then Professor of Poetry, introduced his name in the Creweian oration for 1839, when Oxford gave Wordsworth his D.C.L. degree.

The subject of the year was the care bestowed by founders and benefactors on the "*Pauperes Christi*," and this gave Keble a happy opportunity of introducing the name of him, "*qui unus omnium maxime poetarum, mores, studia, religiones pauperum collocaverit non dicam bono verum etiam cœlesti lumine*," and advising the study of his works, "*si qui ex intimo animo sentire vellent arcanam illam necessitudinem honestæ Paupertatis cum Musis severioribus, cum excelsa Philosophia, immo cum sacrosancta Religione*." A dedication to Wordsworth of Keble's *Prælections on Poetry* also gave him much pleasure, especially the phrase "*ad sanctiora erigeret*," used of the tendency of his works.

The enthusiasm at Oxford on this occasion seems to have only been equalled by that on the visit of the Duke of Wellington. "I went up," says Dr. Arnold,<sup>2</sup> "to Oxford, to the Commemoration . . . to see Wordsworth and Bunsen take

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs*, ii. 366.

<sup>2</sup> *Life*, ii. 160.



their degrees, and to me, remembering how old Coleridge inoculated a little knot of us with the love of Wordsworth when his name was in general a byword, it was striking to witness the thunders of applause, repeated over and over again, with which he was greeted in the theatre by undergraduates and Masters of Arts alike."

On this occasion he breakfasted at Magdalen with Dr. Bloxam and Keble, who said, "I should like it of all things, for I have never been in the same room with him." Wordsworth asked for a copy and translation of Keble's passage about himself, naively adding, "I want to take it home and show it to my wife, for she never thinks that I am anybody." He was the guest of Dr. Gilbert at Brasenose, whose little blind daughter, Bessie, was delighted to hear him say he had almost leapt off the coach in Bagley wood to gather the blue speedwells. "One day she was in the room alone when he entered. For a moment he stood silent before the blind child, whose sensitive little face turned wonderingly towards him. Then he gravely said, 'Madam, I hope I do not disturb you?' She never forgot that 'Madam,' grave, solemn, almost reverential."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Elizabeth Gilbert*, by Miss Martin.

## CHAPTER X

### EVENING SHADOWS

THE marriage of Wordsworth's daughter Dora to Mr. Quillinan, an old neighbour and warm admirer of his genius, whose orphan daughters had received much care and kindness at Rydal Mount, took place in 1841. Mr. Quillinan had been an officer in the Peninsula, and was a man of considerable literary talent; but it is perhaps not surprising that Wordsworth should have been as reluctant as he proved himself to part with his only daughter. After the marriage Wordsworth with some of his family paid farewell visits to his old haunts—Alfoxden, Nether Stowey, and Coleorton. Sir George Beaumont had died in 1827,<sup>1</sup> and there must have been a sad pleasure in going over the old ground.

In 1842 Wordsworth resigned his office of stamp distributor, which was conferred on his son

<sup>1</sup> He bequeathed Wordsworth an annuity of £100 to defray the expenses of a yearly tour. Compare "Elegiac Musings"—

"With copious eulogy," etc.

William, and shortly afterwards his name was put on the Civil List for £300 a year, which placed him in comparative affluence, though, as he once told a friend, he "had laboured hard through a long life without more pecuniary emolument than a lawyer gets for two special retainers, or a public performer sometimes for two or three songs."<sup>1</sup>

In 1843 honours were to be conferred on Wordsworth from a still higher quarter, when on the death of Southey the office of poet-laureate was offered to him. He accepted it with some little hesitation, after being assured by Sir Robert Peel that he would not be obliged to produce formal odes and poems on State occasions. As often happens, the moment of recognition of his gifts almost coincided with their cessation. He wrote little of importance after this date.<sup>2</sup>

A few sonnets belong to this period—those on the "Punishment of Death," and on some of the Occasional Services of the Church, the lines on "Grace Darling," whose bravery was fresh in the public mind, and a monumental inscription on Southey.

Meanwhile he had the sorrow of losing his nephew John, Fellow of Trinity, whose fine taste, accurate scholarship, and elevated character were deeply regretted both by his family and his

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs*, ii. 218:

<sup>2</sup> Two letters on the Kendal and Windermere railways were written in 1844.

college; and who died December 1839. A favourite grandson died in 1845 (see the touching lines, "Why should we weep or mourn, angelic boy?"), and early in 1846 the good old Master of Trinity, the poet's only surviving and much-loved brother, passed away.

Saddest of all was the failing health of Mrs. Quillinan, for whom foreign travel was tried in vain, and who faded away beneath her parents' eyes, and died 9th July 1847.

"Our sorrow I feel is for life, but God's will be done." So wrote the bereaved and broken-hearted father, and all who knew him concur in testifying to the depth of his grief. For years she had been the sunbeam of his home. Her buoyant sympathetic nature, her quickness and vivacity, her winning tenderness enlivened and comforted his old age. He idealised her, as may be seen by the frequent references to her in his poems; more especially the sonnet recalling an actual incident when he has a kind of day-dream of her, which he afterwards interprets—

I saw the figure of a lovely maid.

At another time in his blindness she is his "Antigone";<sup>1</sup> at another, her graceful figure appears in the "Triad" with the daughters of his brother-poets Coleridge and Southey—

<sup>1</sup> See lines beginning—

"A little onward lend thy guiding hand."

Her happy spirit as a bird is free,  
That rifles blossoms on a tree,  
Turning them inside out with arch audacity.  
Alas ! how little can a moment show  
Of an eye where feeling plays  
In ten thousand dewy rays;  
A face o'er which ten thousand shadows go ?

at another, he is affected by her emotion before the convent window at Bruges.<sup>1</sup> "Ah, James, she was so bright," he said one day regretfully to his old servant. "Don't you think she's brighter still, sir, where she is now?" The poet could not answer for a burst of tears.

Mrs. Wordsworth writes to a niece (no date of year, but speaking of a widowed friend): "Your uncle, who has strongly felt that *he ought* to write to her upon her bereavement, has not had the courage. Indeed, dear S——, I am sad to say that his mind is still too exclusively fixed upon the one overwhelming feeling. And on this account I regret that our visit to Carlisle was delayed, especially at *this time* when Dr. Jackson is residing there, from whose society I think your uncle *might* have been called out of himself, their views on most subjects being congenial."

There is little to chronicle in Wordsworth's life after this. We have a glimpse of him in 1849, less than a year before his death, from the

<sup>1</sup> "In Bruges town is many a street," etc.

pen of an American visitor,<sup>1</sup> who describes him "as a tall figure, a little bent with age, his hair thin and gray, and his face deeply wrinkled. The expression of his countenance was sad, mournful I might say; he seemed one on whom sorrow pressed heavily. He gave me his hand, and welcomed me cordially, though without smiling . . . and leading the way he conducted me to the dining-room. At the head of the table sat Mrs. Wordsworth, and their three grandchildren made up the party. . . . It was a humble apartment, not ceiled, the rafters being visible; having a large old-fashioned chimney-place, with a high mantelpiece." A conversation about American progress led to a remark about the rapid spread of the English tongue. "Wordsworth at this looked up, and I noticed a fixing of his eye as on some remote object. He said that, considering this extension of our language, it behoved those who wrote to see to it that what they put forth was on the side of virtue. This remark . . . was made in a serious thoughtful way, and I was much impressed by it. After some other topics, classical literature being mentioned, Wordsworth spoke of Herodotus as 'the most interesting and instructive book next to the Bible that had ever been written.' . . . He spoke

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Ellis Yarnall, whose letter is given more fully in the late Bishop of Lincoln's *Memoirs*, ii. 484.

of France. 'I should like to spend another month in France before I close my eyes.'

"There was tenderness, I thought, in his tone when speaking to his wife; and . . . throughout the conversation Wordsworth's manner was animated, and he took pleasure in it, evidently. No one could have listened to his talk for five minutes, even on ordinary topics, without perceiving that he was a remarkable man. . . . I may speak too of the strong perception of his moral elevation which I had at the same time. No word of unkindness had fallen from him. He seemed to be living as if in the presence of God by habitual recollection. A strange feeling, almost of awe, had impressed me while I was thus with him.

"He walked out to the entry with me, and then asked me to go again into the dining-room to look at an oak chest or cabinet he had there—a piece of old furniture curiously carved. It bore a Latin inscription, which stated that it was made 300 years ago for William Wordsworth, who was the son of, etc. . . . and ending, 'on whose souls may God have mercy.' This Wordsworth repeated twice, and in an emphatic way, as he read the inscription. It seemed to me that he took comfort in the religious spirit of his ancestors, and that he also was adopting the solemn ejaculation for himself. There was something very impressive

in his manner." Doubtless he felt, to use his own words<sup>1</sup>—

Time will come  
When here the tender-hearted  
Will heave a gentle sigh for him,  
As one of the departed.

There is something in this picture of the old age of Wordsworth which reminds us of a glimpse we have of him some years earlier (1844) from the pen of Miss Caroline Fox. "He took us," she says, "to his terrace, whence the view is delicious; he said, 'Without these autumn tints it would be beautiful, but with them it is exquisite.' It had been a wet morning, but the landscape was then coming out with perfect clearness. 'It is,' he said, 'like the human heart emerging from sorrow, shone on by the grace of God.'"

His own "time" was not far distant. He caught a chill one cold bright afternoon (Tuesday, March 12, 1850), as he sat watching the sunset in front of White Moss Cottage, and an attack of bronchial and pleuritic inflammation ensued, which left him in a state of great exhaustion, and he fell into a lethargy from which it seemed almost impossible to rouse him to take food or medicine or to be moved for an hour daily into an easy-chair. His son John, who had more influence with him than any one else, was in constant attendance on

<sup>1</sup> Inscribed on a stone in the grounds at Rydal.



him ; and to his offer of administering the Holy Communion his father replied, " That is just what I want," and the service took place accordingly.

On or about this day Mrs. Wordsworth said gently to him, " William, you are going to Dora." He made no reply at the time, but more than twenty-four hours afterwards, when some one was drawing aside his curtains, he said, as if awaking from a quiet sleep, " Is that Dora ? " A little before his death he made his son understand that he wished for the " commendatory prayer," which was read, and which he seemed to follow mentally. He passed gently, almost imperceptibly, away on 23rd April, as the clock was striking twelve at noon. The day was memorable as that of Shakspeare's birth and death, and also of the death of Cervantes.

As his sister was taken past the door of his room she was heard to exclaim, " O death, where is thy sting ? O grave, where is thy victory ? "

Those who looked on his countenance after death were struck by the change which had passed over it, seeming to have softened the masculine character of the living face.

He was buried at Grasmere on the 27th April, near the graves of his own two young children, Dora Quillinan, Sarah Hutchinson, and Hartley Coleridge. " Let him lie near us ; he would have wished it," were his own words regarding the son

of his old friend. Dorothy Wordsworth lingered till 25th January 1855 ; and last of all, in January 1859, after some years of patient waiting, rendered cheerful by her wholesome simple faith and goodness of heart even amidst old age and blindness, Mary Wordsworth was laid to rest among those to whom she had been as a ministering angel.

## CHAPTER XI

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

A FEW words may be added, before we close, on the general character and tendency of Wordsworth's writings. It would be true, though only part of the truth, to say that he did for poetry something like what Turner did for painting. Any one who views a collection of landscapes painted before the days of that great artist will see that the sense of the exquisite colouring of Nature was dormant, and that her delicious surprises and the modulations of her endlessly varied moods had been almost unnoticed, that painters did not seem to know one tree from another, and had never observed *how* rocky masses were built up, or how local colour was blended with sky-reflections in a mountain pool. Turner has taught us all to see ; and that Wordsworth likewise, in his own department, has done this, has become by this time almost a truism.

But Turner also had, though he knew it not, a

rare poetical gift. He felt, and taught us to feel. Who can look at the "Fighting Téméraire" and not find himself as hopelessly incapable of putting the sentiment into his own words as he is of translating "Sunt lacrymæ rerum, et mentem mortalia tangunt"? A great picture *is* a great poem, but it is a poem of a certain order. It can touch the emotions, but it cannot soar, as poetry does, to the higher regions of the intellect. It is here that we feel Wordsworth's superiority. He is not only one of the profoundest of thinkers, but there is nothing in the world of concrete images for which he cannot find an analogue in the world of invisible existence.<sup>1</sup> It is as if one of the men in Plato's cave not only possessed the power of felicitously describing the shadows themselves, but could by some God-given insight deduce 'from them what the realities were to which they belonged. How one feels this in such poems as the "Leech-Gatherer," the "Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle," where most writers would have given us in one case

<sup>1</sup> As he says himself of the forms of outward Nature—

. . . By contemplating those forms  
In the relations which they bear to Man  
He shall discern, how, through the various means  
Which silently they yield, are multiplied  
The spiritual Presences of absent things.  
Trust me, that for th' Instructed, time will come  
When they shall meet no object but may teach  
Some acceptable lesson to their minds  
Of human suffering, or of human joy.

*Excursion*, iv., near end.

a poem on the level of "Pity the sorrows of a poor old man," and in the other a Scott-like picture of baronial life. He himself for this reason considered the "White Doe of Rylstone" as his best production. For him childhood and poverty were the disguise of angels, and sorrow a muffled messenger from heaven, and beauty a thing not of lines and colours but that which

Dwells in deep retreats ;  
Whose veil is unremoved  
Till heart with heart in concert beats,  
And the lover is beloved.

Above all he is the poet of virtue (and the word by its very derivation includes the thought of manliness). His whole character, utterance, teaching, are *strong*. There is no truckling to *boudoir* tastes ; no cheap finery, no vulgar sentiment. He has the deep reserve, one might almost say, of a Hebrew poet.<sup>1</sup> He expects his reader to do for himself all that an intelligent being should be capable of doing—

It is no tale, but should you *think*,  
Perhaps a tale you'll make it.

He is fearlessly realistic, but his realism is the very opposite of a well-known school of modern French novelists. The one carries the "earthen vessel" lovingly *because* of the treasure within it ; the other carefully empties it of all its spiritual

<sup>1</sup> See an interesting Essay of Mr. Hutton's (*Theological Essays*) on this subject.

significance, and gloats over the coarse mud-encrusted potsherds.

Doubtless we must confess that Wordsworth's genius had its limitations. He was deficient in sense of form and proportion. He lacked precisely the training which a little more intercourse with the world would have given him ; that sense of what is congruous or incongruous, of what must be left out because every one knows it already, or dwelt upon because no one has ever heard it before, which literary society gives. His touch is never light ; (" The Kitten and Falling Leaves " perhaps excepted) we miss in him the "abandon," the charming playfulness which even some writers capable of deep seriousness possess ; he never seems to leave off thinking ; he "takes his pleasure sadly" ; he may be *μεγαλόψυχος*, he is certainly not *μεγαλοπρεπής*. He

Husbands Nature's riches from expense.

An old retainer who remembered him as a child once described to me his absent, scarcely conscious habit of collecting little twigs and sticks (presumably for firewood) when out walking. This instinct of *thrift* (as has been well observed) ran through everything. He never likes to exhaust a subject ; the hand is always closing jealously over its treasure, reluctant to loosen its grasp ; the heart, though deeply, very deeply, stirred, is always

controlled by the masculine will. His personality was too strong to lose itself in any kind of character painting except of the simplest and most primitive order. He was no dramatist ; no great writer of fiction. The Providence which had sent us our Shakspeare and our Scott created him for a totally different purpose. We do not complain of Plato because he was not Euripides or Aristophanes ; a generation does not want the same thing twice over. He was no humorist. Why should he be ? Others could, and did, supply that element in contemporary life.

He had little sympathy, we are told, for the works of others. This no doubt is somewhat noticeable. I think we may make a twofold defence. It is quite certain that he *did* admire the poets among whom he had grown up. Not to speak of the great classics, for we know how he admired Homer<sup>1</sup> and Plato (the *Phaedo*, the tragedy of *Othello*, and Walton's account of George Herbert's death, were, in his opinion, the most pathetic of human compositions), we know how he studied Virgil, while he said, "Horace is my great favourite, I love him dearly"—not to mention all these we must recollect his words : "When I began to give myself up to the profession of a poet for life, I was impressed with a conviction that there were

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs*, ii. 467, especially the character of Achilles, living under a foresight of his own death, the tower scene with Helen, etc.

four English poets whom I must have continually before me as examples—Chaucer, Shakspeare, Spenser, and Milton.<sup>1</sup> These I must study, and equal *if I could*; and I need not think of the rest.”

But in his essay already mentioned we have warm appreciation of many poets of the second class. Burns also he heartily admired and felt for. Charles Lamb he delighted in. But these were all writers whom he assimilated when young. Coleridge, of course, developed side by side with himself. How few men *really* care for poetry which they have become acquainted with when they are over thirty!

Secondly, we must remember that he had a very high standard of poetical worth, and that neither Scott, nor Byron, nor Keats, nor indeed Shelley, fulfilled the conditions which he had placed before himself. “A great poet,” he said, “is a great teacher. I either wish to be considered as a teacher or as nothing.” Again, how *could* he, being himself, admire Goethe? Confront a man who has high spiritual aims, deep reverence, steadfast love, and a noble yet chivalrous simplicity of character, with the brilliant wit and shrewdness, the insight into human weaknesses, the stagy taste rather than the dramatic instinct, the

<sup>1</sup> Old engravings of these four poets and Ben Jonson adorned the dining-room at Rydal—a portrait of Burns was in another room.



occasional coarseness or flippancy of the author of *Faust* and *Wilhelm Meister*, in nearly every page of whose writings we have the low, half-animal aspect of the passion of love, and a view of the relations between the sexes which seems to this day to have lowered the place of women in German society, and can we expect the one to praise or appreciate the other? Many men less honest than Wordsworth would—merely to save themselves trouble—have uttered a few civil commonplaces about their contemporaries, but he was too sincere for that.

Once more, we may be told that he was unsympathetic. There is a grain of truth in this. He was certainly self-absorbed, though there was no petty envy or meanness in his nature.

Few of his critics have known what it must be like, that state of "possession" in which a man of genius finds himself, and which makes him for the time oblivious of others. He was naturally obstinate, self-willed, and irritable; and indeed without a strong and tenacious will he never could have persevered in the teeth of so much opposition. On the other hand, those who knew him best<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> He was especially kind to his servants, and much beloved by them. His kindness too in visiting his poor neighbours in sickness is well remembered. A good deal of trivial gossip about him in his last years has found its way into print; in order to appreciate it at its due value let us ask ourselves what kind of impression posterity would probably receive of us if similar authorities were consulted.

would be most ready to testify to his regret at having yielded to such moods, how earnestly he struggled against them, and how willing he was to learn the lessons that life teaches us all of gentleness and humility. Writing to a friend he says (1844): "I feel myself in so many respects unworthy of your love, and likely to become more so. Worldly-minded I am not; on the contrary, my wish to benefit those within my humble sphere strengthens seemingly in exact proportion to my inability to realise those wishes. What I lament most is that the spirituality of my nature does not expand and rise the nearer I approach the grave, as yours does, and as it fares with my beloved partner. The pleasure which I derive from God's works in His visible creation is not with me, I think, impaired, but reading does not interest me as it used to do, and I feel that I am becoming daily a less instructive companion to others. Excuse this egotism; I feel it necessary to your understanding what I am, and how little you would gain by habitual intercourse with me, however greatly I might benefit from intercourse with you." And with regard to the *Prelude* he says: "It is not self-conceit, as you will know well, that induced me to talk so much about myself, but real humility. I began the work because I was *unprepared* to treat any more *arduous subject*, and *diffident of my own powers*." Again: "It is the habit of

my mind inseparably to connect loftiness of imagination with that humility of mind which is best taught in Scripture."<sup>1</sup>

But little space is left to treat of his influence over poets and thinkers of the generation below his own.

Such writers as John Stuart Mill, Thomas Carlyle, and above all, John Ruskin, have themselves recorded their obligations to his works. The last especially might be said to have spent most of his time in applying Wordsworthian principles to the interpretation of art. The beautiful poetical tribute to him from the pen of Matthew Arnold, as well as his frequent references to him in prose, are fresh in every one's memory. We trace his influence in every page of Clough's too brief poetical remains, but the ever-widening circles of that influence both in England and America have already extended beyond our narrow horizon, and many who have not read a single line of his works have unconsciously been affected by it. Many others, John Keble, Mrs. Browning, Archbishop Trench, Lord Houghton, Henry Taylor, Coventry Patmore, and most of the minor poets between Wordsworth's days and our own, are largely what they are because a mightier genius has been before them, has broken through the trammels of the eighteenth century,

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs*, i. 306.

and has—may we not say?—re-created the language by which English poetry was to find expression, as well as opened new vistas of thought, and brought, as it were, a mass of fresh raw material within the reach of all who possessed the power of working it up.

In a certain sense Wordsworth could have no imitators; it could not have been said of him as of Pope, Scott, Macaulay, or even Tennyson, that "every warbler has his tune by heart." His poetical life was a crusade against mannerism, his great merit that he might have boasted

Ex noto fictum carmen sequar, ut sibi quivis  
Speret idem, sudet multum, fractusque labore  
Ausus idem.

And his influence made itself felt at least as much among thinkers as among poets. His thoughts worked like leaven in the mass, and were often most energetic when least suspected. Merely to try to copy his style—his cadences—was like borrowing the lamp of Epictetus.

Yet it must be owned that his poetry has given occasion for a good deal of Sunday school moralising clothed in unexceptionable grammar and very passable rhythm on the one hand, and on the other for much harmless versification on some very inadequate "motive." Because Wordsworth dealt with such subjects as "We are Seven" and "Simon Lee" in a masterly manner, it does not

follow that it is advisable for less original writers to try and do the same. Wordsworth's poem on "*The Daisy*" has given rise, so to speak, to a good many poems on "*A Daisy*"—a very different thing, as he said himself.

Wordsworth's style only gained such popularity as it ever acquired because of the majesty and vigour of the thoughts. It reminds us of some fine statuesque figure dressed in severe and massive drapery. The folds, which borrow all their beauty from the form they enshroud, become clumsy, uninteresting, and unattractive when assumed by a commonplace wearer; and many writers of what may be called the "Wordsworthian school" have been, perhaps, in danger of thinking that if they only talk about "simple" things in a "simple" way they also will become poets. Unhappily, if this peculiar class of poetry is generally free from glaring faults, it is, more than anything else, uninteresting.

Few things are so difficult to analyse or define as that force and freshness of mind which characterises a writer of the first class. Why does Thomas à Kempis live when so many other devout writers are defunct? Why has John Bunyan survived so many, both of the worldly and the unworldly, in literature? Why do certain old songs fascinate us? What is it that makes one man a great poet and another only a fatiguing

writer of verse? Why is Gray read and Mason forgotten? Is it intensity? It may be, but it is intensity showing itself unconsciously, and often when completely off its guard. Perhaps it has some affinity with facial expression. We all know how faces affect us when they are least conscious of doing so—have least intention of making any impression, how much of the whole man or woman is conveyed in a five minutes' interview, how in moments of the completest "abandon" we feel the strength of a strong, the tenderness of a loving character, and in the same way how genius, when completely at its ease, acts most forcibly upon us. This is remarkably the case with Wordsworth. His most spontaneous poems are those which affect us the most, and hence the superiority of his early to his late work.

At this point the name of Tennyson naturally suggests itself. "He is," said Wordsworth in 1845,<sup>1</sup> "decidedly the first of our living poets, and I hope will live to give the world still better things. You will be pleased to hear that he expressed in the strongest terms his gratitude to my writings. To this I was far from indifferent, though persuaded that he is not much in sympathy with what I should myself most value in my attempts, viz. the spirituality with which I have endeavoured to invest the material universe, and

<sup>1</sup> To Professor Reed, Philadelphia. *Memoirs*, ii. 416.

the moral relations under which I have wished to exhibit its most ordinary appearances."

We must remember that the prophecy in these words has been splendidly fulfilled—much of the grand career of the present Laureate was still a thing of the future when Wordsworth wrote. Still, there is no doubt that, especially when young, he was much more addicted to what Hegel would have called "picture-thinking" than his predecessor. What a contrast between the realistic finish of the "Miller's Daughter" bending over the "long green box of mignonette," and such lines as

Beauty born of murmuring sound  
Shall pass into her face.

The "Gardener's Daughter," again, is an exquisite poem *of its kind*, with its Keats-like reproduction of delicious sensations. We could almost photograph the beautiful girl as she stands among her roses with the too "happy shade" caressing her graceful figure. How different from

A slumber did my spirit seal—

where the literal is half dissolved into the spiritual!

Contrast again such a line as that very charming one—

The cuckoo told his name to all the hills,  
with Wordsworth's,

O cuckoo! shall I call thee Bird,  
Or but a wandering voice?

In the one the cuckoo is—and remains—a cuckoo ;  
in the other he becomes an echo from the  
visionary world of a poet's childhood.

In, let us say, seven cases out of ten we  
should find Wordsworth's images drawn from the  
world of ideas, and Tennyson's from that of  
sensation. Compare the rich gallery of varied  
pictures in a poem like "Mariana in the Moated  
Grange" with the "Affliction of Margaret,"  
where the interest lies almost exclusively in the  
world of thought and feeling—

My apprehensions come in crowds ;  
I dread the rustling of the grass ;  
The very shadows of the clouds  
Have power to shake me as they pass :  
I question things and do not find  
One that will answer to my mind ;  
And all the world appears unkind.

Again, Tennyson has, if any man since  
Spenser had, an eye for the characteristics of  
trees. He makes us see his cedars, with their  
"dark green layers of shade," his oaks, his ashes,  
and his "smoking" yews. But trees they are,  
and trees they remain. What a contrast between  
the play of fancy about the "Talking Oak" and  
the weird imaginative treatment of the blasted  
hawthorn tree in the *Prelude*, or the yews of  
Borrowdale ("Yew Trees"), where

Ghostly Shapes  
May meet at noontide ; Fear and trembling Hope,



Silence and Foresight, Death the Skeleton  
And Time the Shadow.

Tennyson is closest to Wordsworth in such poems as "Dora," the deeper and more meditative portions of *In Memoriam*, and some of those fine passages in the *Idylls of the King* which most of us will recall without effort. It may seem paradoxical to say that because Browning resembles Wordsworth less, he resembles him more; but it is true. Browning, like Wordsworth, struck out a vein of his own: one might almost say he created his own vocabulary and syntax. Like Wordsworth, he thought for himself, he set sail alone on an untravelled sea, he "beat his music out" with almost as much difficulty as we can imagine Jubal doing before the Flood. Like Wordsworth, he had years of neglect and unpopularity to face before he obtained recognition. Like Wordsworth's, his poems will always be *βρονῶντα συνετοῖσιν*, they will never attain a vulgar popularity. Like Wordsworth, he looks at the letter mainly, if not entirely, as a vehicle for the spirit—would that we could add, like Wordsworth, he takes pains to make the vehicle as polished and graceful as it can be made! Like him, too, he is fundamentally a philosopher, and as such a theologian; happily for our generation, as it was for that above our own, he has the susceptibility of a great poet to the ethical, spiritual, and divine

elements in all true beauty, and thus and thus alone may hope to ensure his literary immortality among those loftiest bards in whose society Dante himself was proud to become

Il sesto tra cotanto senno.

May we not think that Wordsworth also would have found a welcome there?

These pages are written in the concluding decade of the century at whose earliest dawn, as has been already said, Wordsworth and his sister settled in their lake-side cottage in Grasmere.

It is just a hundred years ago since "the nineties," which were passed by France, and we might say by all Europe, amid the throes of a new birth. A backward glance on society as it then was, followed by the consideration of what it has since become, and is daily in course of becoming, opens for us a vista of endless and absorbing thought. We find class distinctions overturned, religious foundations threatened or demolished, family relations weakened, local interests dissolved or transformed, customs set aside, traditions ruthlessly cut across, old-established convictions questioned, the whole order of things in a process sometimes of sudden disruption, at others of gradual transmutation.

This on the one hand. On the other we find a man created as it seems by heaven with

a complete indifference to conventionalities, a passion for investigating first principles, a power of stripping off from the objects of his contemplation all that was momentary, all that was adventitious, and viewing them in the light of an imagination which was so wide-working and efficient *because* it was so fearlessly truthful.

Preachers sometimes tell us of the keen unsparing light which the next world will shed on our characters and actions. If ever mortal man was gifted—let it be said with all reverence—with some gleams of that spiritual insight which enables the prophets of all ages to look at things as they are and not as they appear, at things in their essence and not in their accidents, surely that man was Wordsworth.

Compare the two following sonnets—

Hail, twilight, sovereign of one peaceful hour ;  
Not dull art thou as undiscerning Night ;  
But studious only to remove from sight  
Day's mutable distinctions. Ancient power !  
Thus did the waters gleam, the mountains lower  
To the rude Briton, when, in wolf-skin vest  
Here roving wild, he laid him down to rest  
On the bare rock, or through a leafy bower  
Look'd ere his eyes were closed. By him was seen  
The self-same vision which we now behold,  
At thy meek bidding, shadowy power, brought forth ;  
These mighty barriers, and the gulf between ;  
The floods—the stars ; a spectacle as old  
As the beginning of the heavens and earth !

## FROM THE ITALIAN OF MICHAEL ANGELO

No mortal object did these eyes behold  
When first they met the placid light of thine,  
And my soul felt her destiny divine,  
And hope of endless peace in me grew bold :  
Heaven-born, the soul a heavenward course must hold ;  
Beyond the visible world she soars to seek  
(For what delights the sense is false and weak)  
Ideal form, the universal mould.  
The wise man, I affirm, can find no rest  
In that which perishes : nor will he lend  
His heart to aught which doth on time depend.  
'Tis sense, unbridled will, and not true love,  
Which kills the soul : Love betters what is best,  
Even here below, but more in heaven above.

If ever there was an age which needed to be taught such lessons as these and other poems of Wordsworth convey, surely that age is our own. *Nothing but a return to first principles will save us* ; any more than it would have saved society at the break-up of the Roman Empire when Gospel morality, taking us back as it did to the very threshold of creation, and within the very gates of Paradise, gave to the tormented heart and the perplexed intellect a firm foothold and a steadfast hope amid the dizzy whirlpools which roared and eddied on every side. At this moment it may be safely affirmed that there is no institution, no social usage, no old familiar tradition, nothing we can think of in our national or personal life, of which we can say that it will last, *unless we can*

*demonstrate the first principles on which it is based.* And it may also be safely affirmed that in this age of innovations, where every month, every week, teems with some new system, some new scheme, when, go where we will, we are met by the figure of a charlatan advertising his pet panacea for all the maladies of the body politic, and for all the woes of the individual mind,—in an age like this, there is only one criterion by which to judge the novelties which are daily being presented to us, only one question which it behoves us to ask, Are they in accordance with first principles, or are they not?

*Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus,* might have been Wordsworth's motto quite as much as it has been that of the Catholic Church. Look at such poems as "We are Seven," "Tintern Abbey," "The Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle," "Hartleap Well," "Strange Fits of Passion," "The Happy Warrior"; but indeed the list is practically endless: what is there in one of these that belongs to any particular century, or can ever be out of date? So again with the principles laid down in the *Prelude* or the *Excursion*. There is nothing local or temporary about them; they are "not of an age, but for all time." And in recommending Wordsworth's poems we may be pardoned for claiming for him a place such as no earlier English writer perhaps has filled to so

great an extent—though many have approached him at a greater or less distance—of one who set before his own and coming generations a view of life which should be adequate to the needs of posterity, not only in one country, or under any given set of conditions, but which should, like the principles of geometry, or the great unalterable laws of morality, be of universal application. A popular writer he never will be, but like his own mountains with their exquisite sky-lines, he will remain unchanged, a landmark to thoughtful and uplifted eyes, when all the bustling life and the casual incidents of this age or that, this group of transitory persons or events, the joys and sorrows, the cares and successes of the moment, shall have passed away and be no more.

## APPENDIX

### CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF THE MORE IMPORTANT OF WORDSWORTH'S POEMS

THE first group of Wordsworth's poems may be roughly said to date from 1787, when his "Lines on Leaving School" were written, to 1798, when the first volume of *Lyrical Ballads* was published. This period, after he once emerges from the trammels of boyhood and very early youth—traces of which are to be found in the "Descriptive Sketches" and "Evening Walk" (published 1793)—is characterised by bold unconventionality, simplicity pushed to the verge of apparent triviality and baldness, deep and beautiful feeling, and at times outbursts of genius of an order as high as he ever afterwards displayed, *e.g.* in the lines on "Tintern Abbey," "We are Seven," and "Expostulation and Reply," etc.

"Peter Bell" and the first book of the *Excursion*, and a portion of the fourth book, also belong to this period. We trace in it indications of a sensitive temperament keenly alive to the evil and suffering in the world, gradually working its way to a calm and philosophic view of life, and largely aided in its quest by the ministry of external nature.

The second, which may be roughly called the Grasmere period, but which includes the poems written at Goslar, extends from 1798-1814 and contains, on the whole, his finest work—the second volume of *Lyrical Ballads*, the conclusion of the *Prelude* and of the *Excursion*, the “Ode to Duty,” “The Happy Warrior,” and the “White Doe of Rylstone.” In this group we find the asperities of his early work much softened down, a tenderer and mellower tone pervades his mind, and yet there is—if anything—an increase of vigour. There is the happiness of one who is in a settled home, surrounded by family endearments, and gradually ripening to a fuller moral and religious development. The coincidence of his brother's death with a great international struggle seems to have brought out at once the intensity of his personal affection, the strength of his ethical convictions, and the ardour of his patriotism. As the lines on “Tintern Abbey” were the culmination of the first period, so we may consider “The Happy Warrior” and “Ode to Duty,” and the magnificent “Ode on Childhood and Immortality” (the crowning point reached by his genius), as the most characteristic productions of the second.

The third period, which may be said to coincide with Wordsworth's life at Rydal, is, as might be expected, somewhat deficient in the wild and forcible freshness of his earlier work. In the “Laodamia” group, however, there is a dignity and solemnity, a perfection of literary finish, and a grandeur of moral tone, which almost makes up for this loss. Among the “Ecclesiastical” and “Miscellaneous” sonnets we meet with occasional gems; and the grand “Ode composed on an evening of extraordinary splendour and beauty” haunts the memory to



an extent which rivals its great predecessor. Other minor poems of great sweetness, beauty, and pathos could easily be mentioned; no doubt there is occasional diffuseness, occasional sermonising, occasional *verbiage*, but such poems as "Yarrow Revisited," the "Evening Ode," some of the "Evening Voluntaries," and many of the sonnets, would have been enough to create a reputation for any poet not absolutely in the first class. Occasionally there is an outburst of the old fire, as in the Ode on "the Power of Sound," while we trace in many others the growing conservatism of advancing age, the tender lingering over bygone memories, and above all, as in the lines on the "Primrose of the Rock," the sincere Christian hope which in Wordsworth's mind was so closely associated with the types of Resurrection and Immortality, and the evidences of Divine Love which he gratefully recognised in Nature.

## EARLY PERIOD (1787)

N.B.—*The more noticeable poems are in Clarendon type.*

Dear Native Regions . . . . .	1787
Calm is all Nature . . . . .	"
Evening Walk . . . . .	1787-88
Descriptive Sketches . . . . .	1791-92
Salisbury Plain ("Guilt and Sorrow," published 1842) . . . . .	1793-94
<b>The Borderers</b> . . . . .	1795-96

LYRICAL BALLADS, vol. i., published conjointly with Coleridge, in 1798, and containing—  
The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere.

The Foster Mother's Tale.

Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree, etc.

The Nightingale, a conversational poem.

The Female Vagrant (part of "Guilt and Sorrow").

Lines written at a small distance from my House  
etc. [To my Sister].

Simon Lee.

Anecdote for Fathers.

**We are Seven.**

**Lines written in Early Spring.**

The Thorn.

The last of the Flock.

The Dungeon.

The Mad Mother ("Her eyes are wild").

The Idiot Boy.

Remembrance of Collins.

Expostulation and Reply.

The Tables Turned.

Old Man Travelling (Animal Tranquillity, etc.)

The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman.

The Convict.

**Lines written a few miles above Tintern  
Abbey.**

Besides this, "Peter Bell" (published 1819) and the  
"Ruined Cottage"—part of *Excursion*, belong to  
the same date, and see next period.

#### GRASMERE PERIOD (1798-1814)

(Poems written at Goslar marked †)

Second volume of LYRICAL BALLADS, published 1800—

**Hartleap Well.**

†**There was a Boy.**

The Brothers.

Ellen Irwin.

†Strange Fits of Passion.

†**Song (She dwelt among the untrodden ways).**

†**Three years she grew.**

†A Slumber did my Spirit seal.

The Waterfall and the Eglantine.

The Oak and the Broom.

†**Lucy Gray.**

Idle Shepherd Boys.

'Tis said that some have died, etc.

Poor Susan (1797).

Inscription for Hermitage, etc.

Inscription on House on Island at Grasmere.

†To a Sexton.

Andrew Jones.

Two Thieves.

A Whirlblast (1798).

Song for the Wandering Jew.

†Ruth.

Lines written on a Stone.

†Lines written on a Tablet in a School.

†**Two April Mornings.**

†**The Fountain.**

†Nutting.

Pet Lamb.

†Written in Germany, etc.

The Childless Father.

The Old Cumberland Beggar (1798).

Rural Architecture.

†A Poet's Epitaph.

A Character.

†A Fragment (Danish Boy).

**Poems on Naming of Places** (first group).**Michael.**First six books of *Prelude* written between 1799-1805.

Remainder before end of June 1805.

**Other Grasmere Poems—**

Sparrow's Nest . . . . .	1801
Alice Fell . . . . .	1802
Beggars . . . . .	"
Foresight . . . . .	"
To a Butterfly ("Stay near Me") . . . . .	"
Emigrant Mother . . . . .	"
<b>Daffodils</b> . . . . .	"
Lines at Foot of Brotherswater . . . . .	"
Leech-Gatherer ( <b>Resolution and Independence</b> ) . . . . .	"
Farewell (published 1815) . . . . .	"
The Sun has long, etc. . . . .	"
Ode on Childhood (begun) . . . . .	"
Sonnets . . . . .	"
<b>Westminster Bridge</b> . . . . .	"
(Calais, etc.) . . . . .	"
<i>Memorials of a Tour in Scotland</i> . . . . .	1803
(including " <b>Highland Girl</b> ," "To the Sons of Burns," "Pass of Killicranky," " <b>Stepping Westward</b> ," " <b>Highland Reaper</b> ," "Kil- churn Castle," and "Yarrow Unvisited")	
<i>Patriotic Sonnets</i> —"Men of Kent," etc. . . . .	"
Writing <i>Prelude</i> . . . . .	1804
<b>She was a Phantom of Delight</b> . . . . .	"
<b>Elegiac Stanzas</b> (Peele Castle) . . . . .	1805
To the Daisy ("Sweet Flower") . . . . .	"
Elegiac Verses (Death of John Wordsworth) . . . . .	"
Lines on Brother's Grove (published 1815) . . . . .	"
The Sheep-boy (published 1845) . . . . .	"

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The Waggoner (published 1819) . . . . .	1805
<b>Ode to Duty</b> . . . . .	"
Incident Characteristic of favourite Dog, etc. . . . .	"
Fidelity . . . . .	"
<b>Happy Warrior</b> . . . . .	1806

In 1807 two volumes of poems were published comprising,  
besides those already mentioned, the following—

**Louisa.**

Redbreast and Butterfly.

Sailor's Mother.

To the small Celandine.

To the same Flower.

The Horn of Egremont Castle.

**Affliction of Margaret** ("The Forsaken" published 1845).

Kitten and falling Leaves.

Seven Sisters (Solitude of Binnorie).

**To H. C. six years old.**

Among all lovely Things my Love had been.

I travelled among unknown Men (1791).

**To a Skylark.**

Miscellaneous Sonnets.

The Sun has long been set.

O Nightingale, thou surely art.

My Heart leaps up.

Who fancied what a pretty Sight.

The Sparrow's Nest.

Gipsies.

**To the Cuckoo.**

To a Butterfly ("I've watched").

The Blind Highland Boy.

The Green Linnet.

To a young Lady—Long Walks, etc.

By their floating Mill.

Star-gazers.

To the Daisy ("In youth").

To the same Flower ("With little here").

To the same Flower ("Bright flower whose home").

Various Sonnets.

Once in a lonely Hamlet.

### **A Complaint.**

Personal talk.

Yes, it was the Mountain Echo.

To the Spade of a Friend.

### **Song at Feast of Brougham Castle.**

Lines composed at Grasmere.

Ode, "Intimations of Immortality," etc.

Convention of Cintra . . . . .	1808-9
Essay on Epitaphs, and translations from Chiabrera . . . . .	1810
Spanish Sonnets . . . . .	"
Guide to the Lakes . . . . .	"
EXCURSION (published 1814) in course of composition . . . . .	1808-11
Fifth book and onwards . . . . .	1811
Epistle to Beaumont (published 1842) . . . . .	"
Praised be the Art . . . . .	"
Loving she is . . . . .	"
Surprised by joy, impatient as the wind . . . . .	1812
WHITE DOE OF RYLSTONE published . . . . .	1815
The Force of Prayer . . . . .	"
Yew-Trees (1803), published . . . . .	"

## RYDAL PERIOD (1814-50)

*Memorials of Second Tour in Scotland*

("Yarrow Visited," etc.) . . . . .	1814
Thanksgiving Ode . . . . .	1816
Classical Poems—	
<b>Laodamia</b> . . . . .	1814
<b>Dion</b> . . . . .	1816
<b>Ode to Lycoris</b> . . . . .	1817
Pass of Kirkstone . . . . .	"
Longest Day . . . . .	"
<b>Evening Ode</b> (Splendour and Beauty) . . . . .	1818
Publication of " <b>Peter Bell</b> " and " <b>Wag-</b> <b>goner</b> " . . . . .	1819
September . . . . .	"
<b>Duddon Sonnets</b> with Dedication to Brother . . . . .	1819-20
Pillar of Trajan . . . . .	"
Memorials of Tour on Continent . . . . .	1820
<b>Ecclesiastical Sonnets</b> . . . . .	1821-22
Rydal Chapel (Lady Fleming, etc.) . . . . .	1823
Poems on Tour in North Wales . . . . .	1824
Let other Bards . . . . .	"
<b>O dearer far, etc.</b> . . . . .	"
Such age how beautiful (Lady Fitzgerald) . . . . .	1827
Poems on Tour on Rhine . . . . .	1828
The Triad . . . . .	"
Wishing Gate . . . . .	"
<b>Power of Sound</b> . . . . .	"
This Lawn, etc. . . . .	1829
Translations of Virgil . . . . .	"
Presentiments . . . . .	1830
Elegiac Musings (Coleorton) . . . . .	"

Primrose of the Rock . . . . .	1831
Devotional Incitements . . . . .	1832
If this Great World . . . . .	1833
Evening Voluntaries, etc. (second group) . . . . .	1833-34
Yarrow Revisited, and other Poems published	1835
Labourer's Noonday Hymn . . . . .	
Memorials of Tour in Italy, and other	
Poems . . . . .	1837-38
Sonnets . . . . .	1838-42

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\* \* The best and best known likenesses of Wordsworth are his bust by Sir F. Chantrey ; his statue in Westminster Abbey by Mr. Thrupp ; Pickersgill's portrait, now at St. John's College, Cambridge ; another, done by the same artist for Sir R. Peel (an engraving of which is prefixed to the *Memoirs*) ; and Haydon's fine meditative head (also engraved). For fuller particulars see Professor Knight's *Life*.

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Readers who have not as yet begun the study of Wordsworth may find the following suggestions useful as to the order in which his most important poems should be read.

He himself divided them in a way which was probably satisfactory to no one but himself. One may hunt about for a good while after an old favourite without knowing whether it is a "Poem of Sentiment and Reflection," a "Poem of the Imagination" or one "Founded on the Affections," and the reader may be strongly advised not to begin his study of Wordsworth on the principles which such an arrangement suggests.

Again, the chronological arrangement, taking



the earliest poems first, is hardly advisable. Although the reader is not quite so unprepared as Wordsworth's own contemporaries were for the baldness and apparent triviality of some of the earlier poems, yet they will be better appreciated by him when he has attained some familiarity with his author, and has learnt to "read between the lines."

Perhaps the best way would be to begin with Wordsworth's most popular poems.

They will be found to be those in which he is most spontaneous and appeals most directly to the affections of his hearers. Such poems as "The Fountain," "The Two April Mornings," "Louisa," "Strange Fits of Passion," "She dwelt among th' untrodden ways," and indeed the majority of the "Poems Founded upon the Affections" (omitting perhaps "The Idiot Boy," "Vaudracour and Julia," and "Artegal and Elidure") would come under this category. So would the First Book of the *Excursion*, and that containing the "Churchyard among the Mountains" (vi.), especially the "Story of Ellen" at the close.

The poems on his brother's death and that of his children (see *ante*, pp. 93, 119) might also be read, and Wordsworth's own prose Prefaces, and Matthew Arnold's Introduction to his *Selections* might well be studied at the same time. Read also Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*.

The second group would also consist of poems of a personal kind, but with perhaps somewhat more of an imaginative colouring thrown over them, as in "Lucy Gray," "Michael," "She was a Phantom of Delight," "To H. C. Six Years Old," "The Old Cumberland Beggar," "The Leech-Gatherer" ("Resolution and Independence"), "The Female Vagrant," "Peter Bell," "The Thorn," "Lucy," and others to be found in "Poems of the Imagination," "Childhood," and "Old Age." The *Life of Hartley Coleridge* by his brother Derwent, with Wilkie's beautiful portrait of him as a boy (Moxon), the *Memorials of Coleorton*, and William Blake's *Poems*, would illustrate this period.

The third group would consist of poems of an ethical character. "The Happy Warrior," the "Ode to Duty," "Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle," "Hartleap Well," "O dearer far than light and life are dear," "The Primrose of the Rock," "Evening Voluntaries," "Lines left upon a seat in a Yew-tree" ("Nay, traveller, rest"), and many of the Patriotic, Ecclesiastical, and Miscellaneous Sonnets.

Read with these any good History of England which refers to the first decade of the present century, and with the Ecclesiastical Sonnets Southey's *Book of the Church*, Dr. C. Wordsworth's *Ecclesiastical Biography*, Perry's *History of the*

*Reformation*, Izaak Walton's *Lives*, etc., Milton's *Sonnets*, and Gray's *Poems*.

The fourth group would consist of Wordsworth's most purely imaginative poems. "Tintern Abbey," "Ode on Childhood and Immortality," "We are Seven," "The Cuckoo," "The Daffodils," "The Sonnet on Westminster Bridge," "The Highland Girl" ("Memorials of a Tour in Scotland, 1803"), "Stepping Westward," "The Highland Reaper," the three Yarrow poems, "The Danish Boy," etc.

Read with these the *Phædo* of Plato, and the last book of his *Republic* (may be had in Jowett's translation), also the poems of Vaughan, Burns, and Scott, and D. Wordsworth's *Journal in Scotland*.

In the fifth group might be taken those poems in which he dwells on natural beauty mainly or primarily for its own sake. Poems on the "Naming of Places," "The Daisy" (3), "The Lesser Celandine" (2), "Yew-trees," "A Whirl-blast," "The Green Linnet" (a delicious poem), "The Skylark" (2), and several others among "Poems of the Fancy," "The Idle Shepherd Boys," "Pass of Kirkstone," "A Night Piece," and the fine descriptive passages in the *Excursion* and the *Prelude* (most of which have been already noticed), with others of the same type. Perhaps "The Waggoner" might be added, and the "Duddon" Sonnets.

Read Shelley's "Skylark," and compare it with

that of Wordsworth ; also Knight's *Through the Wordsworth Country*, if accessible, and William Wordsworth's own *Guide to the Lakes* ; also, for the sake of comparison, some of Spenser's, Thomson's, Keats's, Tennyson's, and Matthew Arnold's descriptive poetry.

The sixth group contains his more *classical poems* ("Pillar of Trajan," "Laodamia," "Dion," "Ode to Lycoris"). To this might be added the "White Doe of Rylstone" and the "Force of Prayer."

A study of Virgil (especially *Aeneid*, bk. vi.) might well be combined with this period ; also the Life of Dion in Plutarch (English translation) ; also the account of Trajan in Merivale's *Rome*. Read also the sketch of the Rising of the North in Froude's *History of England*, vol. ix. chap. liii., and Shelley's *Adonais*.

Lastly would come the more serious portions of the *Excursion* and of the *Prelude* (of the latter every word should be read), and the great mass of sonnets and miscellaneous work, some of which, especially his latest productions, might be omitted.

*The Industrial Revolution* by Arnold Toynbee (Longmans), or any good sketch of the economic history of the present century, might well be studied as illustrative of the *Excursion*. Read also Shak-

spere's *Sonnets* and Carlyle's *French Revolution* (for *Prelude*).

Among his prose works the Tract on the Convention of Cintra is perhaps the one most worthy of study, but it is not easily procurable ; the *Guide to the Lakes* is, on the other hand, easily accessible, and no visitor to the Lakes should be without it.

A complete list of the "Bibliography of Wordsworth" will be found in Morley's excellent edition of his "Complete Poetical Works," but the names of a few of the principal writers on his poetry are given here :—

*Coleridge's* "Biographia Literaria" (G. Bell and Sons).

*Professor Shairp's* essay on Wordsworth in "Studies in Poetry and Philosophy" (D. Douglas, Edinburgh).

"The Journal of Dorothy Wordsworth," edited by him (D. Douglas, Edinburgh).

*John Wilson's* "Essays, Critical," etc., vol. i.

(Blackwood, London).

*J. R. Lowell's* "Among my Books"—Wordsworth.

*Clough's* "Poems and Prose Remains"—Lecture on Poetry.

*David Masson's* "Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats"

(Macmillan).

*R. H. Hutton's* "Essays" (Macmillan).

*Bagehot's* "Literary Studies" (Kegan Paul).

*J. H. Shorthouse's* "Platonism of Wordsworth"

(Macmillan).

*Dean Church's* "Dante and other Essays" (Macmillan).

See also Ward's "English Poets—Wordsworth."

*Professor Dowden's "Studies in Literature"*

(Kegan Paul).

*Dennis's "Heroes of Literature—W. Wordsworth"*  
(S.P.C.K.)

*Aubrey de Vere's "Essays"* (Macmillan).

*W. Pater's "Appreciations"* (Macmillan).

*Knight's "Selections"* (4s. 6d. Kegan Paul).

*Knight's "Wordsworthiana"* (Macmillan).

*Matthew Arnold's "Selections from Wordsworth"*  
(Macmillan).

*F. Myers's "Wordsworth"* (English Men of Letters)  
(Macmillan).

Routledge's 1s. vol. of "Selections" is an admirable one for beginners.

These books have been mentioned as easily accessible to the general reader, and any one who has access to a collection of old *Quarterly* or *Edinburgh Reviews* or other magazines would find much instruction and some entertainment in studying the change of feeling towards Wordsworth in the literary world during the last eighty years. Miss Caroline Fox's *Memoirs* are also very interesting on the subject of Wordsworth. The works of Ruskin, especially the earlier ones, are full of Wordsworthian ideas applied to art.

THE END

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